# TAO Independent School

9 – 11 St Pauls House, Brookes Mill, Bankfoot Lane, Huddersfield HD4 7NP

Unique reference number (URN): 152777

| **Pre-registration inspection report:** | 14 October 2026 |
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| **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 has a clear vision for the proposed school. He has carefully considered how best to combine academic learning with therapeutic support to enable pupils to access an ambitious curriculum that will meet their needs, building learning from pupils' individual starting points. The proprietor has carefully considered pupils' social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs, creating a resource-rich environment aimed at meeting the needs of pupils who have previously struggled to attend education settings.

The proposed school intends to increase pupil numbers gradually to ensure that each pupil is able to access a carefully planned transition into the setting. The proprietor has established close links with Kirklees local authority, working as part of the alternative provision panel in order to best understand the needs of the pupil cohort that the proposed school intends to support.

The proprietor has ensured that all relevant policies, procedures and operational systems are in place ready for the proposed school to open. The recruitment process for staffing is almost complete and a governance structure has been established to ensure a strategic oversight of the school. The proprietor can articulate how compliance with the Independent School Standards (ISS) will be maintained once the school opens. Governance arrangements will provide appropriate challenge and accountability. Governors and school leaders will work with the proprietor to support ongoing quality assurance through the school's operational dashboard.

The standards in this part are likely to be met if the Department for Education (DfE) decides to register the proposed school.

## Part 1. Quality of education provided

### Curriculum

The proprietor has established a broad curriculum offer that covers all required areas of learning. Curriculum plans are organised in developmental stages that will allow learning to be adapted to meet pupils' individual starting points. Curriculum plans are supported by a range of more detailed lesson plans and schemes of work. This learning offer will be adapted further to recognise pupils' special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and barriers to learning as each pupil joins the school.

There is a clear focus on reading, communication and mathematics. The proprietor understands the importance of early reading. A suitable systematic synthetic phonics programme will be in place for all pupils who are unable to read accurately and with fluency. The core curriculum is complemented by the proposed school's creative and outdoor curriculums. The school will also offer a therapeutic curriculum to support pupils to understand their feelings and recognise their triggers. This offer is intended to develop pupils' emotional literacy and self-regulation.

The school has a detailed personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) curriculum. This includes relationships education. The PSHE curriculum is planned appropriately for pupils' ages and needs. This will consider the individual needs of pupils. A separate policy is in place for relationships education. Parents and carers will be consulted and the processes for responding to requests for withdrawal from aspects of this education offer is clear.

The school's outdoor education offer is central to their approach. Using carefully trained specialists, pupils will develop teamwork skills and learn to identify and manage risk, while developing resilience.

## Teaching

The school's approach to teaching has been carefully planned based on the needs of the pupils the school will serve. The proprietor understands the importance of ensuring that teachers have expert knowledge of the school's curriculum as well as how learning may be adapted to meet the needs of all pupils.

Detailed schemes of work and resource packs are in place to provide structure for lessons. This content will be adapted as necessary to build learning from each pupil's starting point. Reading, writing and communication will be taught creatively, with learning adapted to meet pupils' individual learning needs. Mathematics will be taught practically and linked to real-world tasks where appropriate. Science investigations and practical experiments will be conducted both in the classroom and outside to support pupils' environmental awareness.

The proprietor is able to articulate how high-quality teaching will be supplemented by carefully targeted support. Adults will be deployed appropriately to support pupils to access the curriculum. The school has a range of resources available to meet pupils' individual needs and reduce barriers to learning.

The PSHE, outdoor and therapeutic curriculum will provide pupils with the opportunity to build their confidence, self-esteem and independence. Pupils will learn to manage risk while developing an understanding of their own needs, supporting their emotional wellbeing and resilience.

## Assessment

The school aims to use their assessment processes to celebrate progress and support the development of each pupil. There is a clear assessment policy and framework in place which will support leaders and staff to identify pupils' individual needs and highlight any gaps in learning. This will support pupils to make progress from their starting points, building the knowledge and skills they need to be ready for the next stage of their education.

The checks that adults make on what pupils know and remember will inform curriculum adaptations both in the classroom and outdoors. This will help staff to understand the academic, emotional and social progress of each pupil. Pupils' progress will be tracked against the school's stage-based curriculum rather than age-related expectations. The proprietor can articulate how this will support pupils to be ready for the next stage in their education.

Adults will access regular training to support them in their role. The headteacher will have operational responsibility and the special educational needs and/or disabilities coordinator will ensure curriculum adaptations are purposeful and appropriate. All adults who work with pupils will contribute to individual learning

journeys. Regular pupil progress reviews will take place as part of each pupil's individual learning journey.

The standards in this part are likely to be met if the DfE decides to register the proposed school.

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

The proprietor has planned for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development through the school's therapeutic, relationship-based curriculum. Leaders intend to promote the fundamental British values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs. These themes are woven through academic, therapeutic and outdoor learning activities and are intended to support pupils' personal development. The curriculum includes opportunities for pupils to develop emotional literacy, resilience, social responsibility and an understanding of their rights and responsibilities.

The PSHE offer includes relationships and sex education. It is planned as a structured and well sequenced programme. Leaders have ensured that pupils will revisit important themes, such as emotional literacy, healthy relationships, consent, personal boundaries, online safety and personal wellbeing, in a developmentally appropriate way. The curriculum is designed to reflect pupils' individual needs and to help them make safe and informed choices. Learning will be reinforced through the school's therapeutic approach, outdoor learning and opportunities for reflection.

Leaders understand their responsibilities in relation to safeguarding, the 'Prevent' duty and political impartiality. Staff will receive appropriate induction, information and guidance to help them discuss sensitive and potentially controversial issues in an age-appropriate and balanced manner. Leaders have considered how pupils need to be protected from inappropriate influences and how they will encourage pupils to develop critical thinking and their sense of self.

Leaders intend to provide regular opportunities for pupils to express their views and participate in decision-making. Pupil voice is central to the proposed provision, with pupils expected to contribute to discussions, agreements and decisions affecting their learning and daily routines. Through collaborative activities, restorative conversations and group reflection, pupils will learn to respect others' views, understand the consequences of their actions and develop positive relationships.

The standards in this part are likely to be met if the DfE decides to register the proposed school.

## Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

### Safeguarding

The proposed school has a safeguarding policy that has regard to current statutory guidance. The proprietor has undertaken appropriate safeguarding, designated safeguarding lead and 'Prevent' duty training. They understand the importance of identifying and responding to risks that individual pupils may face.

The proposed school has established suitable safeguarding systems, recording processes and referral arrangements. Safeguarding will form part of the initial work undertaken with pupils and families. Leaders intend to use information gathered before admission to help identify risks and plan appropriate support and transition arrangements. A suitable online recording system is in place to support the identification, recording and monitoring of safeguarding concerns.

The proprietor has a clear understanding of safeguarding responsibilities, including the management of disclosures, low-level concerns, allegations and referrals to external agencies. They understand their duty to refer a person who may be unsuitable to work with children to the Disclosure and Barring Service.

### Behaviour and supervision of pupils

The proposed school has established appropriate arrangements for promoting positive behaviour and supporting pupils' emotional development. Leaders have developed a behaviour policy which reflects the needs of the intended cohort of pupils with SEMH and emotionally based school avoidance.

Behaviour management strategies are closely aligned to the school's therapeutic approach. The focus is on helping pupils understand, regulate and communicate their emotions. The information gathered before admission: including risk assessments, education, health and care (EHC) plans and discussions with parents, will be used to identify individual needs and inform support strategies. The proposed staffing model, including high adult-to-pupil ratios and a teaching assistant assigned to each group, is intended to provide effective supervision and support for pupils throughout the school day.

## Anti-bullying

The proposed school has suitable arrangements in place to prevent and deal with bullying. The school intends to promote positive relationships, mutual respect and emotional understanding through the therapeutic curriculum, PSHE and wider school culture.

Policies clearly set out expectations, procedures for responding to concerns and arrangements for recording and monitoring incidents. Leaders demonstrated an understanding of the potential vulnerabilities of the intended cohort and how early intervention, relationship-based practice and close communication with families will be used to address concerns should they arise.

## Health and safety, fire and first aid

Appropriate arrangements are in place to promote pupils' health, safety and welfare. The proprietor has established a comprehensive programme of compliance monitoring supported through operational dashboards and routine checks. Health and safety policies, premises checks and associated records are in place.

The fire risk assessment has been completed and suitable fire safety measures, including signage, alarms, emergency lighting, evacuation procedures and maintained equipment, were seen during the inspection. First-aid arrangements are well developed. Suitable facilities are available, including a medical room, secure medication storage and first-aid resources.

The proprietor demonstrated a clear understanding of the procedures for administering medication, recording accidents and responding to medical emergencies. Appropriate arrangements are also in place to ensure the safety of pupils accessing outdoor learning activities.

## Admissions and attendance

The proposed school has established suitable admissions and attendance procedures. The proprietor has developed a clear admissions process which includes consultation with local authorities, engagement with parents and careful consideration of pupils' needs before placement decisions are made. The proprietor stated that pupils will not be admitted until leadership and staffing appointments are secured.

Attendance procedures include daily monitoring, communication with families and clear escalation processes where concerns arise. Digital systems are in place to maintain admission and attendance registers. The proprietor demonstrated a

secure understanding of responsibilities relating to attendance monitoring, children missing education and communication with local authorities where required.

### Risk assessment

The proposed school has appropriate arrangements for identifying, managing and reviewing risk. The proprietor has established site-specific and activity-based risk assessments, including those relating to outdoor learning and movement around the site. Individual risk assessments will be completed for pupils based on information gathered through admissions, baseline assessment and ongoing review.

The proprietor explained how risks associated with pupils' social, emotional and mental health needs, attendance, behaviour and emotional regulation will be considered as part of each pupil's learning journey. Risk assessment processes are supported by clear monitoring systems and regular review arrangements to ensure that risks are appropriately managed.

### Use of restrictive interventions

The proposed school's behaviour policy includes suitable arrangements relating to the use of reasonable force and restrictive intervention. The proprietor demonstrated an understanding that restrictive intervention should only be used when absolutely necessary, proportionate and lawful.

Proposed staff induction arrangements include training in behaviour management and restrictive intervention. The proprietor explained that de-escalation, emotional regulation and therapeutic support will be prioritised to reduce the likelihood of restrictive intervention being required. Systems are in place to record, monitor and review incidents and to consider pupils' individual needs, vulnerabilities and identified risks when planning support strategies. The requirements relating to restrictive intervention are likely to be met.

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

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

The proprietor understands the checks required when appointing staff and those responsible for the management of the school. Recruitment arrangements cover identity, medical fitness, right-to-work checks and relevant qualifications. They also provide for enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service checks, barred list checks, prohibition checks and additional checks where a person has lived or worked overseas.

Those responsible for recruitment have completed safer recruitment training and appropriate arrangements are in place to ensure the suitability of the proprietor body and those involved in the management of the school. The proprietor does not intend to use agency or supply staff. Where additional staffing capacity is required, the school intends to use suitably vetted staff from within the wider organisation who are trained in the group's therapeutic approach and who will be subject to the same recruitment checks.

### The single central record of these recruitment checks

The proposed school has an electronic single central record in place. Although no staff have yet been appointed to the proposed school, the record has been established and includes the proprietor and provision for governors and future staff. It includes the required fields to record recruitment and suitability checks, including the dates on which checks have been completed. The record forms part of the school's wider safer recruitment arrangements and is ready to be used when appointments are finalised.

The standards in this part are likely to be met if the DfE decides to register the proposed school.

## Part 5. Premises of and accommodation at schools

### Toilet and washing facilities, water supply, changing accommodation and showers

Suitable toilet and washing facilities have been provided for the proposed cohort of up to 8 pupils. There is a dedicated pupil toilet which can be secured from the inside to ensure privacy, together with separate toilet facilities for staff.

Drinking water is readily available and clearly identified. Leaders have ensured that hot water outlets are temperature controlled to reduce the risk of scalding.

### Medical room and accommodation for pupils' therapy needs

Suitable accommodation is available for the short-term care and treatment of pupils. A dedicated medical room is in place adjacent to the pupil toilet and includes a water supply and secure storage for medication. Appropriate arrangements are in place for the administration and storage of medicines.

The proprietor has given considerable thought to the therapeutic needs of pupils. Dedicated therapy and breakout spaces have been created to provide calm, supportive environments for pupils who require emotional regulation, reflection or therapeutic support. These spaces reflect the school's therapeutic ethos and are designed to support pupils' wellbeing and readiness to learn.

## Maintaining school premises to safeguard the health, safety and welfare needs of pupils

The proprietor has taken particular care in designing the learning environment for the proposed cohort. Teaching rooms, breakout areas and shared spaces have been purposefully planned to support pupils' SEMH needs and those who may experience school-based anxiety. Resources, furnishings and room layouts have been carefully considered to create a calm and supportive environment while maintaining the necessary standards.

The premises are completed, fully furnished and ready for use. Appropriate arrangements are in place to maintain the premises and ensure the health, safety and welfare of pupils. Relevant compliance checks have been completed, including fire safety, asbestos management and other premises-related requirements. Appropriate systems are in place to monitor future compliance with the ISS.

## Lighting and acoustic conditions

The proprietor has carefully considered how the physical environment may affect pupils with SEMH needs and those with sensory sensitivities. Classrooms and communal areas benefit from appropriate lighting, ventilation and acoustics.

Significant thought has gone into creating environments that minimise unnecessary sensory stimulation. The use of colour, furnishings, non-reflective finishes and carefully planned room layouts is intended to support pupils' emotional wellbeing, concentration and engagement in learning. These arrangements reflect a clear understanding of the needs of the proposed pupil group.

## Outdoor space

The proposed school has dedicated outdoor learning areas and recreational spaces which form an integral part of the school's curriculum model. Appropriate risk assessments have been completed in relation to the use of these areas and movement between the school building and outdoor spaces. The proprietor has considered how the outdoor environment will support pupils' personal development, wellbeing and engagement in education.

The standards in this part are likely to be met if the DfE decides to register the proposed school.

## Part 6. Provision of information

The proposed school has clear processes in place through which it will provide parents, carers and local authorities with the information required by this part of the standards. Key policies are available through the school's website, including those relating to safeguarding, behaviour, attendance, complaints, admissions and health and safety. Information about the school's aims, curriculum and governance arrangements is also available. The safeguarding policy is published and reflects current statutory guidance.

Suitable arrangements for sharing information about pupils' education, attendance, welfare and progress are in place. Most pupils are expected to have an EHC plan and the proprietor has a clear understanding of the necessary statutory requirements, including contributing to annual reviews and providing regular reports on pupils' progress and outcomes. Information will be maintained electronically and shared securely with parents, carers and commissioning local authorities as appropriate.

The proprietor recognises the importance of maintaining positive relationships with parents and carers. Communication will take place through regular contact, including daily updates where appropriate, planned meetings and written reports on pupils' progress and development. The proprietor also understands the requirements relating to the publication of inspection reports, information about any relevant restrictions imposed by the DfE and information relating to formal complaints. Information about pupils' progress and the school's performance will be made available as required.

The standards in this part are likely to be met if the DfE decides to register the proposed school.

## Part 7. Manner in which complaints are handled

The proposed school has a suitable complaints procedure which is available on the school’s website. It sets out a clear 4-stage process for resolving concerns and complaints. The policy identifies the responsibilities of those involved at each stage and includes clear timescales for investigation, response and escalation.

Appropriate arrangements are in place to maintain written records of formal complaints, the outcome reached and any actions taken. The proprietor demonstrated a clear understanding of how complaints will be managed and monitored in practice. Information relating to complaints will be published in line with the requirements of the standards.

Appropriate arrangements are in place for a hearing before a complaints panel where a complaint cannot be resolved through the earlier stages of the process. The proprietor has identified governors and a wider network of independent professionals who are available to support the school's complaints procedures. This provides sufficient capacity to convene a panel of at least 3 people, including a member who is independent of the management and running of the school.

Parents will be able to attend hearings and be accompanied if they wish. These arrangements are likely to ensure that complaints can be considered fairly, independently and in accordance with the requirements of this part of the standards.

The standards in this part are likely to be met if the DfE decides to register the proposed school.

## The school's accessibility plan

The proprietor has an appropriate equality policy and written accessibility plan. The plan recognises the constraints of the listed building and sets out how reasonable adjustments will be made, where practicable, as needed to support disabled pupils' access to the curriculum, environment and wider school life.

The proprietor has considered accessibility when designing the provision and understands the duties placed on the school under Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010. Suitable arrangements are in place to support individual pupils' needs, including during admission, movement around the site and emergency evacuation.

## About this inspection

Inspectors carried out this inspection under section 99 of the Education and Skills Act 2008, at the request of the registration authority for independent schools. Inspectors checked the school's likely compliance with the independent school standards. 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.

This was the proposed school's first pre-registration inspection.

Inspectors met with the proprietor and a representative from the wider organisation. They reviewed policies, curriculum documentation, assessment arrangements and proposed systems for safeguarding, behaviour, attendance,

governance and the welfare of pupils. Inspectors scrutinised recruitment procedures, the single central record, health and safety documentation and arrangements for meeting the independent school standards. Inspectors also had a tour of the premises, including teaching spaces, therapy and breakout areas, medical accommodation and outdoor learning provision.

The proposed school is an independent special school for up to 8 pupils aged 7 to 11. It intends to provide full-time education for boys and girls. Places are expected to be commissioned by local authorities. The school plans to admit pupils with EHC plans, many of whom are likely to have SEMH needs. The provision is primarily for pupils who have experienced emotionally based school avoidance.

The school's proposed provision combines academic learning with therapeutic approaches and outdoor education. Leaders intend to provide a curriculum that includes English, mathematics, science, humanities, PSHE, RSE, creative subjects and outdoor learning. The proprietor has designed the provision to support pupils' individual needs, helping them to re-engage with education, develop confidence and resilience and prepare for the next stage of their education.

**Lead inspector**

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| Zoe Lightfoot | His Majesty's Inspector |

**Team inspector**

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| Mehnaz Kauser | Ofsted Inspector |

## About this proposed school

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| **Proprietor body** | TAO Education Group Limited |
| **Chair of the proprietor body** | Daniel Giblin |
| **Headteacher** | not known |
| **Type of school** | Other independent special school |
| **Capacity** | 8 |
| **Number of full-time pupils of compulsory school age on roll** | **Provider's proposal:** 8 |

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| **Number of part-time pupils of compulsory school age on roll** | **Provider's proposal:** 0 |
| **Number of pupils with special educational needs (SEN) support** | **Provider's proposal:** 0 |
| **Number of pupils on roll who have an education, health and care plan** | **Provider's proposal:** 8 |
| **Age range of pupils** | **Provider's proposal:** 7–11 |
| **Gender of pupils** | **Provider's proposal:** Mixed |
| **Number of full-time equivalent teaching staff** | **Provider's proposal:** 4 |
| **Number of part-time teaching staff** | **Provider's proposal:** 0 |
| **Annual fees for day pupils** | £60,000 including transport |
| **Email address** | danny@taoactivities.co.uk |
| **Telephone** | 0330 1070050 |
| **Website** | https://taoeducationgroup.co.uk/ |

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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