

Local Outbreak Engagement Board – 14 January 2021

Written question from Sam Mcluckie of Cowes:

I am writing to this board as a very concerned SEN teacher on the Isle of Wight. I would like to encourage the board to publish the SEN and regional specific data that suggests SEN settings are safe for staff members. My school receives a daily barrage of Department for Education (DFE) propaganda and spin that suggests schools are safe places for children. This is a statement that, in the main, I agree with. There is limited evidence of school age children becoming sick, but their ability to spread the disease and act as - in the words of our PM -, "vectors for transmission." I have read the report (<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/covid-19-infection-rates-in-schools-mirror-rates-in-the-community>) from the DFE that the government, local authority and DFE use to suggest that schools are safe , but this are severely limited and lacks statistical credibility if applied across the breadth of the country. The report even states that , "The SIS design (which is concentrated in areas of England where COVID-19 infection was highest at the start of the academic year) meaning the data presented are not intended to be generalisable to England as a whole."

So I would, once again, repeat my request that the local authority, DFE and government publish the evidence that suggests SEN teaching staff are at less risk than their mainstream counterparts and which eliminates their legal requirements to provide safe working conditions. I would like to praise the incredible diligence and hard work of school leaders and place the blame for this debacle squarely at the door of local our local council leaders and MP. I would invite the Rt Hon Robert William Henry Seely to spend a day in a confined classroom with 7 SEN children and 5 members of staff, but this would be a direct breach of Covid-19 security protocols.

Please could the board also raise awareness of the complete lie that schools are shut as we have upwards of 50 SEN children in attendance and are currently, as the law states, open to 100% of our cohort.

Response

Throughout the pandemic the Isle of Wight Council has carefully followed the advice circulated by the DfE. This has been informed by Public Health England and therefore contains the advice both schools and the Local Authority should follow.

Mainstream primary and secondary schools are technically closed but with the requirement that all vulnerable children and children of critical workers are able to access full-time education provision on site, face to face. Proportions of vulnerable children and children of critical workers vary from school to school.

Special schools and alternative provision (such as the Island Learning Centre) are required to remain open. All children in special schools have an EHCP (education, health and care plan) and are therefore within the vulnerable category, hence all children and young people in special schools may have access to full-time, face to face provision.

The position regarding all children attending special schools and how that is reconciled with the need to reduce attendance and social mixing has been clarified by the DfE. The intention when making the decision to 'close' schools was to reduce overall social contact across the education system, geographical areas and the country, rather than individually by institution. This means that the DfE can meet its desire to reduce household mixing overall, by closing schools to all but the children of critical workers and vulnerable children, whilst ensuring the latter continue to have access to high quality education in school. The DfE continues to assert that schools are safe and that reduced numbers are not a direct safety measure but a means of reducing social mixing.