

**Sue Williamson**  
*Chief Executive*

Central House  
142 Central Street  
London, EC1V 8AR

020 7802 2300  
info@ssatuk.co.uk  
@ssat

**ssatuk.co.uk**

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Dear Director of Children's Services,

Re: Pupils with SEND and school closures

I am aware from conversations with schools that government guidance is being interpreted in a variety of ways as at times the guidance appears to be contradictory particularly in terms of social distancing and self-isolation of those with significant underlying health conditions. I feel it necessary to raise a number of concerns in relation to decisions about whether or not pupils with SEND (special educational needs and/or disabilities) in specialist settings should attend school.

A key aspect of the variable interpretations is as a result of the publication of a government guidance publication which states:

We are encouraging local authorities to keep open both residential special schools and residential specialist colleges wherever possible. In addition, we want to keep the majority of day special schools and colleges open, including moving staff into these settings to avoid closure.

Yet other guidance which we support states:

Special schools, colleges and local authorities are advised to make case by case basis assessments of the health and safeguarding considerations of pupils and students on an education, health and care (EHC) plan. For some, they will be safer in an education provision. For others, they will be safer at home. We trust leaders and parents to make these decisions and will support them as required.

A number of Local Authorities and indeed schools are using this first piece of guidance and as such are expecting special schools to continue to operate with all their pupils. Heads are also telling me that some parents are under the impression that they must send their child to school and even more worryingly was the comment from a parent who felt by sending her medically vulnerable child to school they would be more likely to contract Covid-19 and even possibly be refused medical attention.

Staff in specialist settings and those supporting medically vulnerable students in mainstream settings undertake additional training in order that they can carry out certain procedures. If these additionally trained staff are not available due to their own need to self-isolate you cannot just move teachers/TAs from one school to another to cover as they will not have the detailed knowledge of the child and are unlikely to have appropriate specialist training to carry out certain procedures.

I very much agree with the principle that for the vast majority of children, it is safer for them to stay at home. For some pupils, they may be safer at school or be the children of key workers, and of course, these children will need to be looked at on a case by case basis. However, we are aware of some special schools who have decided that they will open on Monday for "anyone that would like to come in". Similarly, we are aware of some special schools that have assessed it is safer for them to close but are being 'directed' by the Local Authority to remain open. This appears to be in direct contradiction to the whole strategy of social distancing for the most vulnerable. I appreciate these are very difficult times, however I would strongly urge you to have high regard for the judgement of school leaders and in particular special school leaders and parents/families who are best placed to make accurate risk assessments on whether school or home is the most appropriate

place at this present time. When making policy, please consider carefully the impact on ALL children and consider a more personalised response rather than one policy for all learners/schools.

Please be assured that all my colleagues within SSAT are doing everything possible to provide practical online support to our schools and their students during this very difficult time.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sue Williamson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

**Sue Williamson**  
Chief Executive, SSAT