

29<sup>th</sup> October, 2021

Mr Charlie Flanagan T.D.,  
Dáil Éireann,  
Leinster House,  
Kildare Street,  
Dublin 2.

**Re: Parliamentary Question – 50227/21**

**To ask the Minister for Health the age at which children in County Laois are receiving a first dental intervention; and if he will make a statement on the matter. -Charles Flanagan**

Dear Deputy Flanagan,

The Health Service Executive has been requested to reply directly to you in the context of the above Parliamentary Question, which you submitted to the Minister for Health for response. I have examined the matter and I outline the position as follows.

The first routine dental appointment for many children in County Laois is currently, fourteen years old. However, the Laois Dental does provide an emergency service for all children until sixteen years, with many children availing of this service before their first routine appointment.

The Public Dental Service Laois provides a targeted service in line with priorities set out by the National Oral Health Office (NOHO). The ability of the service to meet these priorities is based on available resources. In light of available resources, the Public Dental Service Laois, targets adults and children with special needs, the schools dental programme targets only those children in sixth class national school and provides emergency care to children outside of target until aged sixteen years.

In meeting the above targets, and as a result of COVID-19 pandemic with associated staff redeployment and more recently the national HSE cyber-attack, the service is currently three years behind in calling sixth class pupils for examination and necessary treatment.

The following measures are continually being reviewed to improve the dental service in general for the eligible population and to address the treatment waiting lists outlined above;

- a) Increase in contracted hours of existing staff including overtime
- b) Approval of an increase in the WTE of existing HSE staff who wish to increase their contractual hours
- c) Recruiting additional dental teams
- d) Recruiting agency staff

In relation to recruitment, there would appear to be a national shortage of both Dental Surgeons and Dental hygienists owing to the significant challenges faced in attempting to fill vacant posts, either through recruitment campaigns or using numerous recruitment agencies.

I trust the above is in order but please do not hesitate to contact me should you have any further queries on this regard.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Des O'Flynn', written over a horizontal line.

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Des O'Flynn  
Chief Officer  
Midlands Louth Meath Community Health Organisation