

29th October, 2021

Mr Brian Stanley T.D.,
Dáil Éireann,
Leinster House,
Kildare Street,
Dublin 2.

Re: Parliamentary Question – 50627/21

To ask the Minister for Health the progress that has been made in the past 12 months to the school dental scheme in counties Laois and Offaly. -Brian Stanley

Dear Deputy Stanley,

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 Public Dental Service Laois Offaly continues to provide 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 Offaly, 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. The impact of COVID-19 on working practices and the subsequent IT cyber attack has had a significant impact on treatment waiting lists and service capacity.

In the past 12 months since October 2020 the School Dental Programme Offaly has continued to call 6th class children from academic year 2019-20 which is now nearing completion and has recently commenced targeting of 6th class 2020-21. It is projected that 6th class 2020-21 will be completed within five to six months in line with other service priorities and following this 6th class 2021-22 will be targeted.

The Schools Dental Programme County Laois is currently three years behind in targeting sixth class pupils for examination and necessary treatment. Since October 2020, 6th class 2017-2018 has been completed and in September 2021 targeting of 6th class 2018-2019 has commenced. It is projected that given current staffing levels and in line with other service requirements, that 6th class 2018-19 will be completed within eight months.

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', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

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