



Priscilla Lynch
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26th July 2022

Deputy Thomas Gould, TD,
Dáil Éireann,
Dublin 2.

PQ Ref 40701/22

“To ask the Minister for Health the reason that a decision was taken to restrict access to school dental services in Cork to only sixth class students”.

Dear Deputy Gould,

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.

The Primary Care Dental Service provides dental treatment to eligible children, medical card holders, adults and children with special needs and others in the care of the HSE at various locations throughout Cork and Kerry. Children under 16 years of age are treated in HSE dental clinics and adults are treated by private dental practitioners contracted to the Health Service under the Dental Treatment Services Scheme (DTSS).

The emergence of COVID-19 in Ireland in March 2020 severely disrupted the delivery of health services in Ireland. As a result of this and the consequent redeployment of dental staff to community testing, the school dental screening programme was suspended for an extended period. This had a significant impact on the dental screening of second and sixth class pupils in all national schools.

Since the service recommenced with the provision of routine dental care to eligible patient cohorts, it has been dealing with particular challenges in the context of COVID. There are new restrictions to operational procedures in terms of infection control which have resulted in a significant reduction in throughput capacity. In addition a number of clinics that were closed at the outset of the pandemic were not re-opened, as they were deemed unsafe from a health and safety perspective. The dental service was also impacted by the cyber-attack in May 2021 as all patient records are stored electronically. A significant amount of clinical time was lost when written records had to be updated into the electronic patient records after the cyber issue was resolved.

The service is now returning to normal but the school screening programme is well behind schedule. The service is currently prioritising sixth class pupils in the schools screening program. Sixth class children are prioritised for school screening because at that age most of a child's permanent teeth have erupted and those eligible for HSE Orthodontic care can be referred at the appropriate age. This is similar to the approach taken in most Primary Care Areas Nationally. When this patient cohort is completed, it will be followed by the recommencement of screening for children in second class. The

service continues to prioritise special care needs patients and continues to provide emergency care to all eligible patients.

If I can be of any further assistance please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Priscilla Lynch', with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

Priscilla Lynch
Head of Service - Primary Care
Cork Kerry Community Healthcare