



Priscilla Lynch  
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26<sup>th</sup> July 2022,

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

**PQ Ref 40702/22**

**“To ask the Minister for Health when school dental services in Cork will be available to school aged children in all classes currently offered in other counties”**

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, contract tracing and the vaccination programme, 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 dental 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 school 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. Once the backlog of the sixth classes has been resolved we will recommence the screening of second class children.

Our understanding is that most other counties are in a similar situation, in terms of the backlog to the school screening programme, and that at a National level, most dental areas are adopting a similar approach.

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', written in a cursive style.

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