



Oifig an Príomhoifigeach  
Eagraíocht Cúram Sláinte Pobail Lár Tire,  
An Lú, An Mhí

Oifig na bPríomhoifigeach, An Chéad Urlár,  
Coimpléasc Naomh Bríd, Bóthar Cheanannais  
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Deputy Peadar Tóibín  
Dáil Éireann  
Leinster House  
Dublin 2

**Re PQ – 1540/23 - To ask the Minister for Health the reason that the dental clinic in Navan is being closed down; the reason that the four dental clinic surgeries in Navan are being replaced with only two surgeries in Dunshaughlin; the reason that there are no special needs dental services in County Meath; and the reason that first, fourth and sixth class children are not being called for dental appointments in the county anymore – Peadar Tóibín**

Dear Deputy Tóibín,

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 outlined the position as follows;

**1. The reason that the dental clinic in Navan is being closed down;**

The HSE dental clinic in Navan is a busy four surgery dental unit that operates from a prefab that is at least 35 years old. The dental services moved into this prefab in the mid-1990s when the previous occupants moved to the newly constructed Child and Family Centre. The prefab has exceeded the life span of a prefabricated building and its structure is deteriorating to such an extent that further upgrade of the unit is impossible.

The limitations of the existing building were flagged in 2014/15 and the requirements for a new, state of the art dental unit have been incorporated into the design of the proposed Navan Primary Care Centre.

The structural deterioration of the Navan dental prefab in recent years, and the limited electrical capacity to the building, means that service delivery from the prefab unit has become increasingly challenging, and in the absence of any other suitable location, the Navan dental unit has been forced to close.

**2. The reason that the four dental clinic surgeries in Navan are being replaced with only two surgeries in Dunshaughlin;**

Dunshaughlin Primary Care Centre currently has two dental surgeries. The addition of two new dental surgeries will transform the Dunshaughlin dental unit into a four-surgery unit. A new decontamination room and X ray room are required for a four-



surgery dental unit, and this expanded dental unit can be accommodated within the existing building, without the need for an extension.

A state of the art dental unit is included in the plans for the Navan Primary Care centre. When this is built, the additional capacity in Dunshaughlin will benefit the ever-expanding population of south Meath.

The other two dental teams will be accommodated in existing Dental accommodation across the county on scheduled days each week.

### **3. The reason that there are no special needs dental services in County Meath;**

There are special care services in Meath. The HSE Meath Dental Service has one Senior Special Care Dentist who provides primary and secondary care to adults and children with complex special care needs in Meath. All other HSE dentists in Meath also provide dental care to children with special care needs. Within the resources available, oral health care services for patients with special care needs are given priority by the HSE Meath dental service.

Many adults with special care needs accessed dental care through the Dental Treatment Services Scheme (DTSS) but since the withdrawal of many private dental practices from the DTSS scheme, accessing routine care has become more difficult for these patients. While every effort is made by the HSE dental service to accommodate those DTSS special care patients most in need, the HSE special care service does not have the capacity to treat all special care patients who routinely accessed the DTSS. The absence of a Special Care dentist in Louth has also put pressure on the Meath Special Care Service.

The National Oral Health Policy – Smile agus Slainte – which was launched in 2019, envisaged improved access for patients with special care needs, where the general dental practitioner is the first point of contact for providing oral health care services, and the community (HSE) dental service will provide the additional support and time required to treat more vulnerable patients.

Implementation in full of the National Oral Health Policy recommendations for vulnerable patients represents the best way forward to improving access to dental services for special care patients.

### **4. The reason that first, fourth and sixth class children are not being called for dental appointments in the county anymore.**

The reason that children in first, fourth and sixth classes are not being called for appointments in Meath is due to a combination of an increasing population in Meath and without an increase in General dental surgeons and associated dental staff.



The current population of Meath is 220,296, an increase of 13% since Census 2016. This increase was the second highest increase of any county in the country.

The average number of children in each target class cohort in Meath is approximately 3,000 making a total of 9,000 children to be seen, year on year, if three classes are targeted.

Recruitment campaigns are being run regularly to appoint staff to vacancies and in late Dec 22/Jan 23 we advertised in the Belfast Telegraph, British Dental Journal & BMJ. We will advertise in Europe in late March/early April if we continue to fail to attract candidates to vacancies.

In 2018, the number of target classes was reduced to two – first and sixth.

In 2020, before the Covid pandemic struck, as a result of increasing backlogs due to the volume of children to be seen, the service had to reduce the target class to sixth class only. This decision was not made lightly.

The interruption of services for most of 2020 due to Covid, and redeployment of some staff to urgent Covid work, has led to further delays in seeing children in sixth class within the school year.

The Meath dental service is currently operating with just 3.2 WTE Meath general dental surgeons, with the assistance of an additional 1WTE equivalent from the HSE Louth service, which is itself is short staffed.

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

Yours sincerely,

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

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