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23rd May 2023

Deputy Thomas Gould,
Dail Eireann,
Leinster House,
Kildare Street,
Dublin 2.
E-mail: thomas.gould@oireachtas.ie

Dear Deputy Gould,

The Health Service Executive has been requested to reply directly to you in the context of the following parliamentary question, which was submitted to this department for response.

PQ: 22406/23

To ask the Minister for Children; Equality; Disability; Integration and Youth the structure in place to fund the provision of nursing support to children with complex medical issues in school.

HSE Response

The HSE supports special schools that cater for particular types of disability and special needs. These special schools are mainly attached to non-statutory service providers funded by the HSE, many of whom will have support staff, including nursing, in place. These services have been developed by individual service providers and reflect the individual experience and expertise of providers and local services.

In recent years, there have been developments in interventions for young children with complex conditions which have led to greater numbers of children with disabilities participating in school, however, this requires ongoing high levels of support to enable this participation. Some of these children attend special needs schools and this has led to additional requirements in the area of medical and clinical support services in this area.

In May 2017, the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) submitted a report to the Department of Education and Skills of the progress it was making on its Comprehensive Review of the SNA Scheme.

The Progress Report included a number of conclusions and recommendations for consideration. (Please see the attached report).

The NCSE recommended that, as a matter of urgency, the Department would arrange for the immediate preparation and publication of guidance for schools on the management of intimate care; administration of medication; carrying out of complex medical interventions; and restrictive practices.

A Cross Sectoral Team (which is a high level discussion forum) were already appraised of concerns around existing arrangements for the provision of Nursing supports for children with complex medical needs. In 2016 the Ombudsman for Children's Office had requested the development of a common policy around nursing supports. They followed this request with a further letter in 2017.



A Working Group was established and held its first meeting on 6th July 2017.

As part of its work, the Working Group sought submissions from relevant stakeholders including those in the Education and Health areas. The Working Group also conducted a consultation event on 23rd November 2017 in meeting rooms in Croke Park. All those who made submissions were invited to attend. The Working Group recognised that there exists a lacuna in planning and policy development in certain areas which fall between the responsibilities of the DES and DOH. Examples of this arise because schools are generally provided for by the DES while health services are provided for by the DOH. The working Group found that there was no clear responsibility for the delivery of health services in educational establishments or for the delivery of educational services in health establishments. The deficit was clearly demonstrated in the Special School area.

In the absence of national policy governing the provision of nursing staff in special needs schools, and in recognition of the emerging need and inconsistency in approach to provision, the Cross Sectoral Group, which had officials from the two Government Departments of Health and Education, as well as the National Council for Special Education (NCSE), the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) and the HSE, was tasked with reviewing existing arrangements in Special Schools and other settings for the provision of Nursing Supports to support children with complex medical needs;

- Consider the role of Nurses and other medical or non-medical personnel in supporting children with complex medical needs in Special Schools and other settings;
- Identify and develop a proposal for consideration for a model of support to enable equality of access to, participation in and benefit from education for students in Special Schools who have complex medical needs.

The Working Group made several recommendations including, Recommendation 5.1

The Working Group recommends that consideration is given to additional funding being made available to the HSE to enable the provision of some nursing support, including the possible extension of a home care package where one is in place, in cases where a child with complex medical needs is attending a mainstream or other school which is not ordinarily funded for nursing support. Additionally, where exceptional circumstances are present which may exclude a child from attending a special school where nursing provision exists, provision of nursing support should be made available to support the child in their current setting. Such provision should only be considered on an exceptional basis.

As recommend by the Working group referenced above, a pilot is currently in train under DES in collaboration with HSE Primary Care.

The link to this pilot is below:

<https://ncse.ie/national-nursing-programme-pilot-for-children-with-complex-healthcare-needs>

The National Nursing Programme Pilot for Children with Complex Healthcare Needs is a nationwide pilot scheme to be run in partnership between HSE and NCSE. It will run for the 2022/23 school year.

The pilot is to be evaluated and the outcome will inform the provision of nursing support for students with complex healthcare needs into the future.

HSE Primary Care currently funds Paediatric Home Care Packages (PHCPs), through which preferred private healthcare providers deliver nursing care in the home environment to children with complex healthcare needs.

The pilot nursing scheme will, for eligible students, extend the PHCP from their home into the school setting. This will allow an agency nurse attend school with the student for an agreed number of hours per week, and travel to and from school with them, if necessary. There are other eligibility criteria for students and schools.

Many schools, in particular special schools, currently have nurses on site funded through a variety of arrangements. The pilot service will not displace existing nursing services or supports in schools.



The school is responsible for making the submission to NCSE on behalf of the child.

Yours sincerely,

Bernard O'Regan

**Mr Bernard O'Regan,
Head of Operations - Disability Services,
Community Operations**

