

14<sup>th</sup> July 2025

Mr. Michael Cahill, T.D.,  
Dáil Éireann,  
Kildare Street,  
Dublin 2.

**PQ ref 37553/25**

**“To ask the Minister for Children; Disability and Equality to urgently provide respite services at schools (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter.”**

**Details Supplied: St. Mary of the Angels and St Francis Special School, Whitefield Beaufort, Co. Kerry**

Dear Deputy Cahill,

The Health Service Executive has been requested to respond to your parliamentary question submitted to the Minister for Children; Disability and Equality.

The HSE and its funded agencies provide respite care for children and adults with disabilities. Respite can occur in a variety of settings and for various lengths of time, depending on the needs of the individual service user, their family or carer and according to available resources.

HSE South West Disability Services operate separate Children and Adult Respite Forums. Each forum manages the referrals and respite service provision for the population. The overall purpose of each forum is to ensure equitable access to respite services, consistent with each person's assessed need and preference. Service provider representatives and HSE South West Disability Services personnel comprise membership of the Respite Fora.

HSE South West Disability Services is acutely aware of the demand for respite services. HSE South West has significantly invested in respite in recent years. The type and quantum of respite has been increased each year to meet the assessed needs and preferences of as many people as possible. In respect of the increase in

funding allocated for respite, the funding has increased each year with €6.4m allocated in 2019 and €12.4m allocated in 2024. This shows that funding for respite in Cork and Kerry has increased by almost 100% in the 6 year period.

HSE South West Disability Services provide a range of respite models for children and adults. These include residential (overnight) respite centres, afterschool clubs for children and young people, in home support for children and adults, outreach supports and holiday breaks for adults. These options ensure that respite is provided in the manner which best meets the needs of people and their families / carers.

#### Children's Residential Respite Services Kerry

Kerry residential respite services for children aged between 6 and 18 years of age is delivered by St. John of God Services. There are two residential respite houses, one in North Kerry and one in South Kerry. Each house has 4 respite beds and operates 7 days per week with planned closures during the year.

#### Adult Residential Respite Services

Kerry residential respite services for adults who are aged 18 years to 65 years (at the age of entry) is delivered in two respite houses, one in North Kerry and one in South Kerry.

The North Kerry house has a maximum capacity of 4, is operated by The Orchard Care Group, and has reopened in recent weeks following the closure of the service by the previous service provider. Additional funding has been allocated to ensure the service operates 7 days a week.

The South Kerry house has a maximum capacity of 4, is operated by Dovida, and is open at weekends (Friday to Sunday) for 42 weeks per year (excluding bank holiday weekends). Work is ongoing to explore opening the house on a full-time basis subject to funding.

In addition to the two regional respite houses for Kerry, there are an additional six beds for adult respite:

- Four in Brook Lodge in Listowel
- One in Tearmann Lodge in Rathmore
- One in Glebe Lodge in Castleisland

These are historical respite beds provided by Kerry Parents and Friends Association and support adults attending KPFA services.

#### Alternative Respite Services:

Respite is not always overnight and can be provided in a number of ways including centre based day respite, evening and weekend clubs and individualised supports.



Respite is a vital part of the continuum of services for families, potentially helping to prevent out-of-home full-time residential placements, preserving the family unit, and supporting family stability.

Alternative respite services for children in Kerry include afterschool clubs, Saturday clubs and in home support as well as support for children to access community based activities. These are delivered by service providers in accordance with children and their families assessed needs and preferences.

Alternative respite services for adults in Kerry include evening and weekend support, outreach services and holiday breaks. All respite services are delivered by service providers in accordance with the adult and their family / carer's assessed needs and preferences.

#### Current developments:

In Kerry there are two recent developments, one for adults and one for children. The adult North Kerry respite house has been allocated additional funding to enable the service to reopen on a full time basis 7 days a week. This will ensure the service is utilised to its full capacity. For children a weekend club has commenced in Kerry. This club provides respite to approximately twenty children on a rotational fortnightly basis. Families are free to choose a morning or afternoon session which lasts for approximately three hours. Additionally a number of families have been provided with bespoke respite arrangements to support them in response to specific challenges.

HSE South West continue to work with service providers and families to develop additional respite services and continue to support as many people as possible within the allocated quantum of funding available. On receipt of further funding HSE South West will develop further respite services to meet the needs and locations of all people who require respite support. HSE South West remain committed to ensuring that respite is available in the quantum and service type to meet the needs of all those who require respite.

#### St. Mary of the Angels

On June 19th 2025, Minister Hildegard Naughton, Minister of State at the Department of Children, Disability and Equality, visited St. Mary of the Angels and met with management from St. John of God Services Kerry and HSE South West Disability Services.

As part of that visit, Minister Naughton was provided with an overview of St. Mary of the Angels, the de-congregation of some people from the service and the current service delivery on site. Discussion took place regarding the use of the site and the future use of the site.



HSE South West Disability Services and St. John of God Services are working on expanding a working group to explore the future use of the St. Mary of the Angels site. As part of that, representatives from all relevant stakeholder groups, including people supported and / or their families, will be invited to participate in the working group. The group has identified the necessity for input from the 54 people currently residing in St. Mary of the Angels. The voice and views of residents is important as the campus is their home and, with the pace of de-congregation, is likely to be home to some people for a longer period than would be preferred under the '*Time to Move On*' policy for de-congregation.

St. Francis Special School, funded by the Department of Education, is located on the campus grounds of St. Mary of the Angels. St. John of God Services and HSE South West do not have a funding or governance relationship with St. Francis Special School. In respect of the use of the site, a representative from the parents of children attending the school will be invited to the working group in recognition of the location of the school and the cohort of children attending the school. The people who require these services will be at the centre of every discussion and decision in respect of the use of this site.

HSE South West has a vision, consistent with Sláintecare, to deliver services as close to peoples' homes as possible. This enables children and adults to attend services which provide access to local services, expand their social networks and create meaningful lives in their local communities.

#### Services for School Leavers of St. Francis Special School

HSE South West is developing additional day services to meet the needs of school leavers, including those graduating from St. Francis Special School. The services are being developed in conjunction with service providers, including St. John of God Services.

As set out above, HSE South West are delivering on plans to develop respite services throughout Kerry to meet the needs of people close to their homes. Each school leaver can apply to the Regional Respite Service for respite. As additional respite is developed, the type and quantum will expand to meet the needs in locations which best meet the need of the cohort and minimise their travel to services.

HSE South West is aware that the children attending St. Francis Special School are required to travel to the school from their homes throughout Kerry, as it is the only school in Kerry that can meet their needs. It is imperative that the services delivered to people when they graduate from school enable them to live full meaningful lives in their local communities thereby expanding their social networks and circles of support. Research shows that people with strong community links and expanded circles of



support are at a reduced risk of loneliness, abusive interactions and poor health outcomes.

Services located close to people's homes will minimise on travel time to access necessary supports and services. This will in turn enhance quality of life outcomes.

If I can be of any further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact the office.

Yours sincerely,

---

**Ms. Angela O'Neill,  
Head of Disability Services,  
HSE South West.**

