



24th July 2024

Deputy Imelda Munster
Dáil Éireann
Leinster House
Dublin 2

Re PQ 32685/24 To ask the Minister for Health his views on the school dental services in Louth and Meath, including details regarding whether all recommended checks are being provided to primary school children; the number of children in the backlog; when he expects the backlog to be cleared; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Dear Deputy Munster,

The Health Service Executive has been requested to reply directly to you in the context of the above Parliamentary Question, which you submitted for response. I have examined the matter and outlined the position as follows.

The Public Dental Service CHO8 continues to provide a targeted service in line with priorities set out by the National Oral Health Office (NOHO). The ability of the service to meet these priorities is based on available resources.

In light of available resources, the Public Dental Service CHO8 targets adults and children with special needs, the schools dental programme targets only those children in sixth class national school and provides emergency care to children outside of target until aged sixteen years. Also, with further resignations of dental contractors within the Dental Treatment Service Scheme (DTSS), the Public Dental Service now must also provide emergency care to adult medical card holders who are unable to access treatment within the community.

Historically children were targeted in 2nd class, 4th class and 6th class however given available resources targeting has been limited to 6th class only.

Please see below for waiting list for children 6th class National School children Counties Louth and Meath.

	Louth	Meath
School Year	Total Numbers Waiting	Total Numbers Waiting
2021-2022	413	181
2022-2023	1779	1,724
2023-2024	2,899	2,646



As detailed above, the schools dental programme in Louth Meath is nearing three years behind the current 6th class academic cohort, with the service currently targeting 6th class 2021-22. To ensure a fair and equitable service, children are being called in order of their position on the waiting list.

The following measures are continually being reviewed to improve the dental service in general for the eligible population and to address the treatment waiting lists outlined above;

- a) Increase in contract hours of existing staff
- b) Recruitment of additional dental teams
- c) Overtime hours
- d) Employing agency staff

In relation to recruitment, there would appear to be a national shortage of both Dental Surgeons and Dental hygienists owing to the significant challenges faced nationally in attempting to fill vacant posts, either through recruitment campaigns or using numerous recruitment agencies.

There are currently three vacancies for Dental Surgeon positions which are now progressing through recruitment and it is hoped that these campaigns will result in the successful filling of these vacancies.

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 blue ink, appearing to read 'Joseph Ruane', written over a horizontal line.

Joseph Ruane
Head of Primary Care Services
Midlands Louth Meath Community Health Organisation