

22.11.01

1 Deputy L.V. Feltham of St. Helier Central of the Minister for Children and Education regarding barriers to children with sight problems (OQ.108/2022):

Will the Minister advise whether she is aware of any barriers to children with sight problems obtaining the early diagnosis and support which is required to ensure that their educational and social development is not affected by undetected or untreated sight issues?

Deputy I. Gardiner of St. Helier North (The Minister for Children and Education):

Thank you for the Deputy's question. I have checked with the visual impairment team in my department and I am not aware of any barriers within my remit. The diagnosis of the sight problems rest with the Minister for Health and Social Services. Once a diagnosis is confirmed and communicated to C.Y.P.E.S. (Children, Young People, Education and Skills) visual impairment team they will make contact with the school, nursery, home or college regardless of age - it is open for all ages - and usually complete an initial visit to identify any support required within 3 weeks during term time. Any work carried out in schools, nursery, at homes is documented and sent to both home, school or nursery or any other childcare arrangement so that everyone has consistent information how to move forward. The visual impairment team work very closely with Orthoptic Department at the hospital and have an excellent relationship, from what I have been told.

4.1.1 Deputy L.V. Feltham:

Currently EYECAN run a voucher scheme for children requiring glasses and visits to the opticians. Would the Minister commit to working with the other Ministers that she mentioned to ensure that children who may have difficulty affording eyewear can obtain them as and when they need them, so that they do not have impaired vision during their educational classes?

Deputy I. Gardiner:

Thank you for Deputy Feltham's suggestion.

[9:45]

Yes, EYECAN is a charity that currently offers £90 vouchers towards children's glasses, for children under 8, and will offer more support if the families need and if they apply directly to the charity. I will commit also to work with the Minister for Social Security because the financial help for glasses would come through the Minister for Social Security.

4.1.2 Deputy R.J. Ward:

Is the Minister confident that there are mechanisms in place for teaching staff and teaching assistants, who work so closely with young people, if they do spot something that might be a problem with eyesight? I know as a parent myself it can be difficult to spot it and you might miss it.

Deputy I. Gardiner:

First, from what I know, and I am happy to have other conversations, that referrals made directly to the orthoptic service team by health visitors or school nurse and teachers can raise it with the school nurse. Also what is really important to emphasise, the Orthoptic Department run a visual screening service in both public and private schools where the eye test is offered for all reception-age children. The Orthoptic Department also offers an early year test for every child in Mont a L'Abbé, which is undertaken in the school with the support of the visual impairment team. If it is something that the Deputy is aware about specifics I will be welcoming any conversation.

4.1.3 Deputy R.J. Ward:

The Minister mentioned school nurses. Can I just check that there are school nurses in every school and that they have access to ... it is a genuine question because I do not know.

Deputy I. Gardiner:

Yes, I had a meeting a couple of weeks ago, I think, with the Family Nursing and I have confirmed there are school nurses in each school. We have raised that it would be helpful if school nurses will communicate direct with the parents, and I have been reassured this will be raised back.

4.1.4 Deputy G.P. Southern of St. Helier Central:

Once again we find ourselves dependent on charitable funds in order to deliver a particular service. Does the Minister not consider that she should be sharing with her colleagues, especially the income support colleagues, who might be able to use special payments as a means of delivering the cost of tests and the costs of subsequent eyewear?

Deputy I. Gardiner:

What it is important to emphasise is that the support is coming not just from this charity. It is also coming from Social Security. I am unsure about the restrictions and application for this process and I will be happy to work with the Minister for Social Security to explore this further.

4.1.5 Deputy G.P. Southern:

It is my understanding that certainly in the past this special payments fund has been used for medical purposes. Surely this would count as a medical purpose. Does she not consider that?

Deputy I. Gardiner:

I think that is a question for the Minister for Social Security and I need to have a conversation with the Minister to explore this further.

4.1.6 Deputy L.V. Feltham:

Is there any provision within the Government Plan that the Minister considers could be used to provide support for children whose educational career may be impacted by poor vision?

Deputy I. Gardiner:

I need to look into this and to work with the Minister for Health and Social Services and Minister for Social Security on this.