

Mark Drakeford AC / AM  
Y Gweinidog Iechyd a Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol  
Minister for Health and Social Services



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

Eich cyf/Your ref P-04-582  
Ein cyf/Our ref MD/05358/14

Mr William Powell AM  
Chair of the Petitions Committee  
National Assembly for Wales  
Cardiff Bay  
Cardiff  
CF99 1NA

29 October 2014

*Dear William,*

Thank you for your letter of 30 September addressed to the Minister for Education and Skills, seeking his comments on the petition P-04-582 on the subject of the control of head lice in schools. The letter has been passed to me to respond, as the subject falls within my portfolio.

I understand parents' concerns. Head lice can be a persistent problem which can be uncomfortable and irritating for children and highly frustrating and worrying for parents. It can be extremely challenging to clear any infestation and a co-ordinated approach between parents, teachers, the school nurse and the wider community is advised.

Routine screening, followed by the exclusion of those affected used to take place in some schools. This proved to be ineffective in preventing spread. Despite the fact that head lice are no respecters of social status and the cleanliness of hair, there can still be a social stigma attached to infestation with head lice. To compound matters, children would miss significant periods of school for something that, although uncomfortable and irritating, has relatively mild symptoms.

The best way to stop infection is for parents to learn how to check their children's heads for lice. The responsibility for frequent checks must lie with the individual parent who is best placed to detect infestation. In order to encourage this method the Parent Teacher Associations of some schools have organised family health promotion sessions with health professionals. Many schools participate in initiatives such as National Bug Busting Days (31 January, 15 June and 31 October) which aim to ensure children and parents know how to detect and treat head lice and prevent their circulation.

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The Welsh Government has published a leaflet and a factsheet for use in schools (<http://wales.gov.uk/topics/health/protection/communicabledisease/publications/headlice/?lang=en>) which explains and normalises the issue and gives detailed information on how to treat the infestation. Parents may wish to discuss this with the school nurse and teachers if they would find that helpful.

Best wishes,

Mark

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