

[Sample letter to TDs]

**[Insert your own
address]**

[Insert name] TD

Address

Address

Address

[Insert date]

Dear Deputy **[insert name]**,

I am from your constituency and I am writing to express my concern about mental health in Ireland. For too long, successive Irish governments have neglected mental health, and children's mental health in particular. This is a human rights issue.

The education system has a vital role to play in promoting children's mental health; and in identifying children with or at risk of mental health problems, and providing them with psychological and other services and/or referring them to appropriate mental health services. Schools and teachers need to be supported in this role.

The National Council for Special Education estimates that 86,083 children - i.e. 8% of all children - have a special educational need arising from a mental health difficulty. According to the Council, there are many gaps and deficits in how children's special educational needs are currently identified and met, including under-resourcing of schools' capacity to deliver inclusive education.

The 2006 mental health policy, *A Vision for Change*, highlights the importance of children and adolescents remaining engaged in the education system as a crucial first step in breaking the cycle of social exclusion experienced by many people with mental health problems. For children who present a challenge to the school system, it says, the provision of alternative school placements should be explored.

It is advised that schools must play a role in early detection and intervention, and that liaison and work between schools and mental

health services is essential. It makes a number of important recommendations to the Department of Education and Science.

[Insert specific concerns in your own community related to the monthly question(s)]

I would be grateful for an answer to the following questions:

What steps has the Department of Education and Science taken to implement the recommendations in *A Vision for Change*?

Will the Department of Education and Science set out a plan for action in the areas identified in *A Vision for Change*, and if so, when?

I am calling on you to discuss this issue with your party colleagues and raise it with the Minister for Education and Science.

It is critical that official neglect be ended now, and that the rights of children with mental health difficulties are respected.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

[Insert your name]