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# 'No one will be moved against their wishes'

## Minister McGrath deeply impressed by care at St Mary of the Angels on his visit

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Parents of residents at St Mary of the Angels in Beaufort said they were 'very pleased' to receive four commitments from Disabilities Minister Finian McGrath on his visit to the centre last week.

"When I met with parents I gave them four commitments: Firstly, that residents will only move out of St Mary's if they and their family members agree that it is in their best interests. No one will be forced out," Minister McGrath told The Kerryman this week.

"Secondly, if any resident moves it will be only on the basis that it will enhance their life. Thirdly, no planning for any move will take place without an open and inclusive discussion with residents and their families. And finally, the setting up of a peer group with the HSE, family members and the St John of God with the aim of working together in the best interest of the person with the disability."

Chairman of the Parents and Family group Jack Fitzpatrick said they were 'very pleased' with the commitments given by the Minister on Wednesday.

In the course of the visit, Minister McGrath inspected every building on the site, meeting staff and residents before discussing the future of the centre in a meeting with family representatives.

The Minister told The Kerryman he was deeply impressed with the staff and recent improvements undertaken at St Mary's. However, the HSE's 'Time to Move On from Congregated Settings' policy would not be waived in respect of the Beaufort facility.

"The whole idea of Time to Move On is that it is an evidence-based report compiled and written following major research and analysis. This is not just to close down congregated settings," the Minister said.

At its heart is the person with the disability: "My only objective is to make sure the person with disability is given what they want. It's not about the staff, it's about the

person with the disability. Giving them a personal choice is a key thing of mine." He cited a number of case studies supporting the policy, including a man whose rate of violent behaviour reduced by up to 70 per cent following a move from a Leinster institution into a house in which he obtained his own room, amid other freedoms.

€20 million will be spent this year securing homes to facilitate the policy nationwide with a further €80 million to be spent on the project between 2018 and 2021.

St Mary's will not reopen to readmissions, the Minister confirmed. This is an area of huge concern for many worried about the level of care for children into the future. However, Minister McGrath said he secured an extra €96.3 million on the disability budget for 2017 to facilitate his Social Care Disability Plan 2017, with the objective of establishing 8,400 residential homes as well as 182,000 respite beds over the next five to seven years. €2.75 million has also been sourced to provide 'home support hours'. "I will try to have a service from the cradle to the grave for children with disability so all will have long-term care when their parents die."

Parents noted their disappointment on the Minister's rejection of their proposal to establish a centre of excellence in disability training at St Mary's, but he said he was 'open to ideas' for the the centre into the future, not least the use of empty units for disability respite care.

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