

Chapter 11

St Joseph's Industrial School, Dundalk ('St Joseph's'), 1881–1983

Background

- 11.01** St Joseph's, Dundalk was first certified as an industrial school in 1881 and continued in existence until 1983. The Rules and Regulations for Certified Industrial Schools in Saorstát Eireann, which governed all industrial schools, were signed by the Resident Manager of Dundalk on 13th January 1933 and approved by the Minister for Education. The rules gave the name of the school as 'The Dundalk Industrial School, Co. Louth for Roman Catholic Girls'.
- 11.02** It remained a school for girls until 1965, when boys were first admitted. The School received formal recognition in 1971 for the reception of young boys up to the age of 10 years.
- 11.03** The original school was established at the height of the Famine in 1847 by invitation of the parish priest and a number of concerned residents in Dundalk. The Sisters of Mercy came to Dundalk to work for the poor and sick, and five Sisters from Dublin formed the original group. A house, which was formerly the offices of the Excise Commissioners, was provided for them in Seatown Place, and it became known as St Malachy's Convent. From 1855 onwards, the Sisters began to care and provide accommodation for orphans. In 1877, two three-storey houses adjacent to the convent were purchased for use as an orphanage. The funding came from Archbishop Kieran, who was a former parish priest of Dundalk, from a number of donations, and from the proceeds of a bazaar. The school numbers increased, and to accommodate the children an additional wing was built. By 1900, the School had become one long building made up of four adjoining three-storey houses.

Numbers

- 11.04** In 1933, the School was certified for 100 children. The average number of pupils in the decades that followed was as follows:

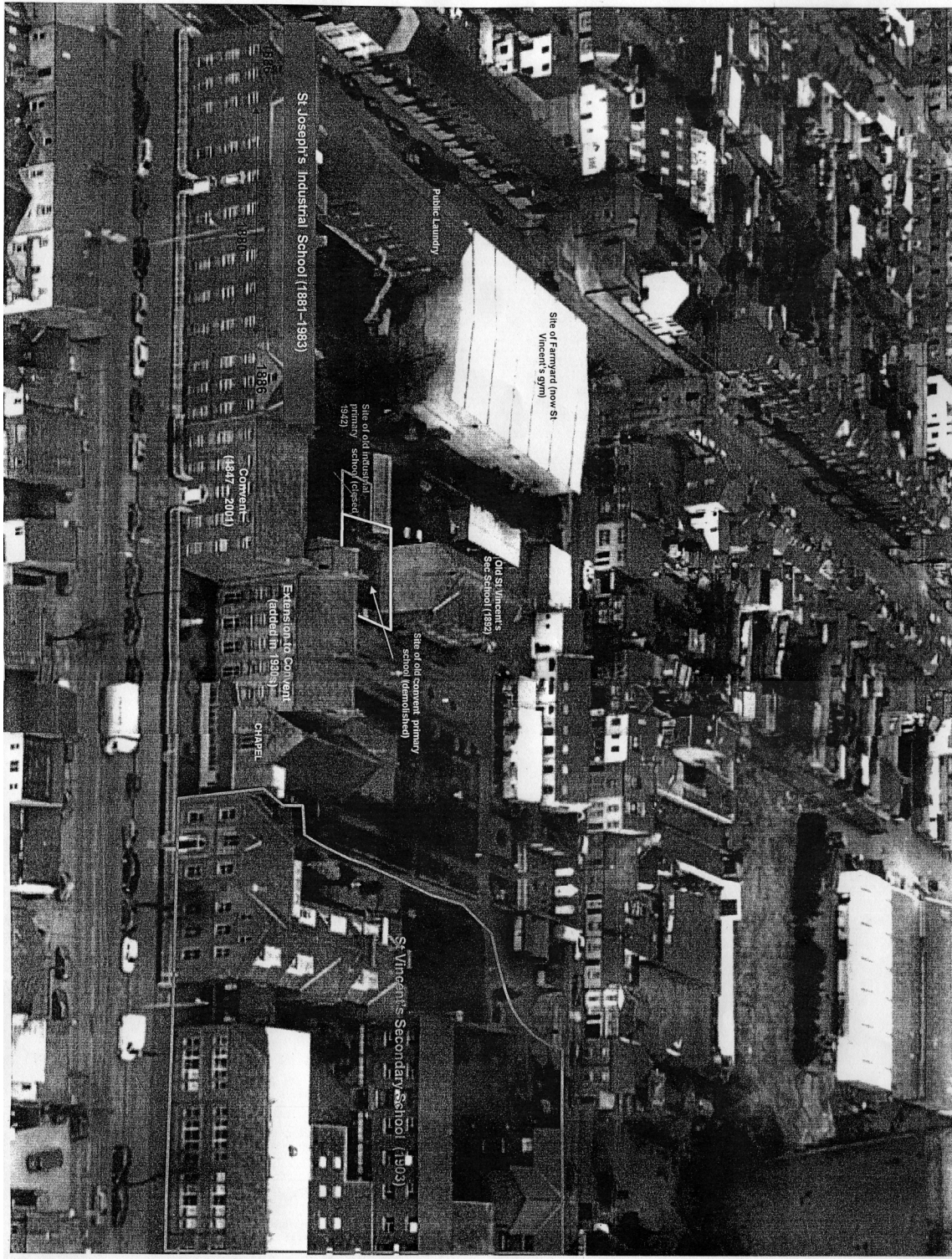
1940s	56
1950s	42
1960s	22
1970s	14

Location

- 11.05** The location of the School on the main street gave it the advantage of being close to the local community, unlike other industrial schools. The Provincial leader of the Sisters of Mercy of the Northern Province, Ireland, Sr Ann Marie McQuaid, summarised these advantages in the first public hearing:

they were out regularly, both on walks and whatever activities were on in the town. Way back even, I saw it in the Punishment Book of the 1930s, they were getting out to the pictures which were being held in the town hall. The older girls got permission to go out

to do messages, to bring the little ones on walks. Also, the people of Dundalk ... seemed to have embraced the children because there was tremendous interaction, there was a lot of support and care from the people of Dundalk for the children right through the 100 years including a god-parenting programme where people god-parented each child within the Institution.



11.06 One witness, Elaine,¹ who was there in the 1940s and 1950s, confirmed that the local people befriended them. She said:

The local people were quite good, they would send in treats like boxes of sweets, my job would be to answer the letters thanking them.

11.07 The location of the School had many disadvantages too. The site was restricted, and offered little space for development. As Sr McQuaid explained:

They had a small yard at the back with a shelter for the children with a roof and three sides and a hot pipe that ran through it and connected to the laundry ... On wet days, they were in the School.

11.08 At the earlier public hearing, she described the atmosphere of the School in more detail:

It was a cold building. Even when the heating was put in in '51 it was still cold and they supplemented it in the 70s and they still had to put in heaters. It has long narrow corridors and it is more long than it is broad. It has a basement and three floors and an attic so it was a very formidable building for little children who were already traumatised to suddenly arrive in.

11.09 **The limitations of the physical accommodation became a recurring theme in the Department of Education General Inspection reports for the period under review. The biggest drawback was that the School lacked adequate recreational facilities for the children. An outdoor concrete yard was all that was available, until an adjoining field, owned by the adjacent primary school, was used from 1952. This was of great concern to the Department of Education over the years and, in particular, the Medical Inspector, Dr McCabe. Another Inspector from the Department of Education, Mr Sugrue, visited the School in 1958, with the principal intention of providing additional recreational facilities for the School.**

11.10 It was not until the late 1960s that steps were eventually taken to bring about improved recreational facilities. It would seem that the School lurched along for many years with very little improvement or modernisation of the resources, undertaken either by the school management or by the Department of Education.

Closure

11.11 The School officially closed in 1983. In a letter dated 24th March 1983, the Sisters of Mercy applied to the Department of Education to resign the certificate for St Joseph's. The Minister for Education withdrew the certificate under the 1908 Act with effect from 24th September 1983.

11.12 Three reasons brought about the closure of the School. First, the Kennedy Report (1970) had recommended the introduction of a group home system, but the physical structure and layout of the School in Dundalk made such a system difficult. The Sisters of Mercy tried to introduce it by establishing smaller groups, with children divided by age. However, the group home structure could only be achieved on a different site and in purpose-built accommodation. The Department Inspector in his General Inspection Report dated May 1973 stated:

This is one Home, almost certainly, where we will be spared the concern of providing a Group Home – at least for the present – for lack of suitable site(s).

11.13 Moreover, the Department of Education's architect, on an inspection of the School in 1976, stated unequivocally that 'This building is a death trap'. He also stated that, 'There is only one Architectural solution to this case and that is vacate the present buildings'. He was also strongly

¹ This is a pseudonym.

of the view that under no circumstances should State monies be spent on the building except for first aid repairs.

- 11.14 The second reason for the closure of the School was that Health Boards in the 1970s were focusing more on fostering as a means of caring for children rather than residential care in institutions.
- 11.15 The third factor that contributed to the closure of the School was staffing: the Resident Manager was elderly and in poor health in the 1970s; and it was difficult to recruit staff.
- 11.16 All these difficulties led the Sisters of Mercy to enter into discussions with the Department of Education in 1977 regarding the closure of the School.
- 11.17 To enable the older girls to complete their terms in St Joseph's, the Sisters undertook the closure gradually. By 1979, the number of children resident in the School had fallen to eight. In 1983, there were just three senior girls resident in the School when it officially closed, and accommodation was provided for them in an apartment opposite St Joseph's.

Management

- 11.18 The Mother Superior in St Malachy's Convent, which was situated adjacent to the Industrial School, officially had overall responsibility for its management. She appointed the Resident Managers and was the person who made decisions about major expenditure. The Resident Managers were responsible for the day-to-day running of the School.
- 11.19 There were three Resident Managers during the period 1936 to 1983. Their terms of office were 1926–1945, 1945–1963 and 1963–1983.
- 11.20 All three Resident Managers are now deceased.

Sources of information

- 11.21 In carrying out its inquiry into St Joseph's, there were three sources of information available to the Committee:
 - (1) The evidence given by three former residents of the School. Originally 21 written statements of complaint were received by the Investigation Committee in respect of St Joseph's Industrial School, Dundalk. As a result of these numbers, Dundalk was listed within the 'top 20 institutions' to be heard [third interim report Dec 2003].² These 20 institutions were ranked according to the number of complaints made against them. By the time the hearings were scheduled, however, only three elected to give evidence before the Committee. The implications of this reduction in the number of complaints are discussed later.
 - (2) The evidence given by Sr McQuaid, Provincial Leader of the Sisters of Mercy of the Northern Province. She gave evidence in public at Phase I and again in public during Phase III hearings.
 - (3) The documentary evidence from the records of the Department of Education, Sisters of Mercy and the Archbishop of Armagh.

² Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse, Third Interim Report, December 2003.

Time period of complaints

11.22 There were three complainant witnesses, spanning the period from 1946 to 1974.

Education

11.23 Children in St Joseph's attended an internal primary school that followed the same curriculum as the local primary school, which was for children of the parish and which was located behind the Industrial School. The internal school closed in 1942, and the St Joseph's children were enrolled in the convent primary school with the children from outside. The School re-located in 1954 to new premises a short distance away. Attendance at external national schools was recommended by the Cussen Commission in its 1936 Report, and the 1942 development was beneficial, especially when the combined school moved away from the industrial school complex in 1954.

11.24 In its Opening Statement the Congregation offered explanations for the educational difficulties experienced by children in the Industrial School:

It seems likely that many of the children had particular educational difficulties because of their disadvantaged backgrounds and the traumatic upheaval they had experienced in their lives by being separated from family and sent into an industrial school.

11.25 Most of the children who went there were very young on entry, aged two years and upwards. Whatever the cause of the under-achievement, the nuns concede that 'it is undoubtedly the case that the method of education provided was inadequate for the needs of many of the children'.

11.26 The Congregation acknowledged the fact that many of the girls left the School with only a basic level of primary education, but submitted that in Ireland generally, few girls attended secondary schools at that time. Two of the former residents complained about the limited education they were given.

11.27 At the Phase III public hearing, the representative of the Sisters of Mercy expressed her regret that many of the children did not get a better education and that many of them did not develop their full potential. She added, however, that some children performed better than others at school. Indeed, some went on to secondary school, and to do nursing or secretarial work. At the public hearing Sr McQuaid conceded that, in general, there was a lack of awareness of the educational needs of the children in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s. Furthermore, there were no special needs teachers or classes to cater for children who had been displaced or traumatised. The majority of girls got no more than the basic level of education and most ended up in domestic service, irrespective of their abilities.

Industrial training

11.28 There were specific regulations from the Department of Education governing the curriculum to be offered in industrial schools. The object was to provide the children with skills and training so that they could become self-reliant in later life. For girls, according to the Sisters of Mercy, this training involved a compulsory programme in childcare, cookery, dairying, housekeeping and crafts. They acknowledged that a number of children have felt aggrieved at having to do housework and chores, because they saw it as doing menial work for the sake of the convent rather than practical training in preparation for employment. The Sisters of Mercy added that, from the 1970s onwards, this practice of working in the convent ceased.

11.29 Some older girls in the early years were trained to work in the public laundry but they were not allowed to use the machinery, which limited the value of this work as industrial training. The Congregation said it recognised the resentment of many former pupils at the narrow employment opportunities provided for them. They also recognised that the full potential of many of the children in the School was not realised and that, as a result, great suffering had been caused.

Department of Education and Science records

- 11.30** The General and Medical Inspection Reports dating from 1939 until the closure of the School give a contemporary account of conditions in St Joseph's. From 1939, when she was appointed, until 1965, these inspections were carried out by the Department's Medical Inspector, Dr Anna McCabe. The School was inspected under various headings, such as accommodation, condition of premises, equipment, sanitation, health, food and diet, clothing, recreation facilities and precautions against fire.
- 11.31** The Department's records reveal the pivotal role of the Resident Managers in the running and policy-making of the School. The Department seldom got involved in management issues.
- 11.32** With the exception of two years in the 1940s, the Inspector reported that the children were well cared for from a physical point of view.

Conditions in the School in the 1940s as revealed by Medical Inspections

- 11.33** The earliest report by Dr McCabe is one dated 1st May 1939. She found that the buildings and equipment were in good order, the children appeared well looked after, and the food was of good quantity and quality. Her only criticism was the lack of playing fields for the children, as they had only a large paved courtyard for recreation.
- 11.34** The next Inspection Report is dated 9th February 1944. On this occasion, Dr McCabe found the School clean and well kept, with the children well cared for. Her only criticism was that the blankets for the children were worn and needed replacing. A letter from the Department Inspector to the Resident Manager requested her to implement the recommendations of the Medical Inspector. The Resident Manager took great exception to the comment that the blankets were worn, and wrote to Dr McCabe informing her that there was indeed a large supply of blankets in the School, which she had not noticed. Dr McCabe replied by expressing her surprise at the upset caused to the Resident Manager, and stating that it was not a personal reflection on her part but that it was her duty as the Medical Inspector to ensure that the children had warm bedclothes, and where she saw blankets beginning to wear thin she had to inform the appropriate Resident Manager to replace them so as to ensure a continuing supply of blankets for the children.
- 11.35** Dr McCabe inspected the School again on 22nd September 1944. Her report was even more critical of the conditions in the School on that occasion. The premises were described as not well kept, with a general air of untidiness around the place. Food was considered to be fairly satisfactory, but she suggested increasing the amount of milk and providing chips several times a week during the winter months. The clothes of the children were described as fairly good but rather patched. Again, Dr McCabe remarked on the absence of recreational facilities and suggested acquiring the loan of a field from the convent. On this occasion, she was highly critical of the management of the School saying:
- There is a general air of laissez-faire all over the place. I was most disappointed to find very many of the children with verminous and nitty heads – necks not washed or ears.
- 11.36** She recommended that the Resident Manager acquire the assistance of a young nun. She drew the Resident Manager's attention to the "verminous" and neglected state of the children's hair, to the fact that the children were underweight, and told her to supply more milk and chips in winter.
- 11.37** Again, this report was followed up by a letter to the Resident Manager from the Inspector of Industrial and Reformatory Schools, requesting that Dr McCabe's suggestions be carried out. The Resident Manager replied that they were being implemented. Another letter in January 1945 enquired whether the recommendations had been effected. The Resident Manager furnished a response on 16th January 1945, stating that the recommendations had indeed been implemented,

save for the fact that there was no young Sister available but a matron had been hired to assist in the dressing rooms.

11.38 Dr McCabe made two inspections in 1945, in February and September. Conditions were reported to be satisfactory and it was also noted that a young nun had been appointed as an assistant to the Resident Manager and that there had been a change of Resident Manager that year.

11.39 However, the following year, the inspection yielded poor results again. On 28th June 1946, having visited the School, Dr McCabe remarked scathingly in her report on the deterioration in standards from the previous year. She was highly critical of the running of the School:

The school on the whole is very carelessly run and slipshod - the children are anything but clean – the supervision is hopeless. Practically every single child in the school had a verminous and nitty head which proves the total lack of supervision in the Dressing Room.

11.40 She found that children ‘under 6 were very badly supervised – their ears and heads were in a dirty state and they had a neglected appearance’. In her report she stated that she had addressed her concerns to the Resident Manager, who had informed her that the conditions were due to the fact that her assistant was out sick and had not been replaced. Dr McCabe clearly found the state of affairs to be completely inadequate and unsatisfactory, stating ‘this is neglect, this just cannot be excused’.

11.41 The report made clear her low opinion of the management of the School. She wrote:

This school is peculiar in that there never seems to be any lively interest taken in the children, there is always an apathetic air about the place. The Rev Mother is never very interested in the Industrial School and when I have asked for extra help she always has an excuse that she would willingly give it had she sufficient staff to call upon.

11.42 She summed up her frustration with the regime as follows:

if these people are going to run a school they must look after these children – otherwise I will have to recommend that they are not fit to look after children and have them transferred elsewhere.

11.43 She did not accept the lack of staff as a valid excuse, and she issued a warning:

Now, if Dundalk wish to keep their school they will have to make changes and employ people who are interested in this work and who will supervise the children.

11.44 Dr McCabe commented, ‘I have nothing to say about the food as all the children are adequately fed and look well, if dirty’. Indeed, she commented that this aspect was the only redeeming feature of the running of the School. She ended her report by writing:

I had really hoped for more changes when the new Sister started but instead of any improvements the reverse has taken place.

11.45 The Department again followed up the report by writing to the Resident Manager, reiterating the matters raised by Dr McCabe in her report, namely the poor hygiene of the children, the lack of supervision in the dormitories, “the verminous and nitty heads”, the poorly kept premises, and the fact that the assistant nun was absent for long periods of time and had not been replaced.

11.46 The Resident Manager replied that they were in the process of carrying out the recommendations. She informed the Department that the assistant nun had returned and that extra help had been engaged for helping with the small children. She also informed him that the staircase and corridors were in the process of being painted. However, there was no mention of any steps being taken

to improve the hygiene of the children or carry out the other recommendations in the Medical Inspector's report.

- 11.47** Two inspections were carried out in 1947. After the first, on 9th May 1947, Dr McCabe noted that 'the school has certainly improved' and that the children were well cared for. The second inspection was on 13th November 1947, when she reported the School as having 'definitely improved'. From that time on, her reports repeatedly noted that the School was improving.
- 11.48** Whilst noting routinely that the School had improved and that the children were better cared for, in her report of 21st June 1948, Dr McCabe continued to make suggestions for bettering the lives of the children in the School, particularly in regard to recreational facilities such as a play hall. This was still a matter of concern to the Department in 1958, when Mr Sugrue, the Inspector of Industrial Schools, visited.

Conditions in the School in the 1950s as revealed by Medical Inspections

- 11.49** Throughout the 1950s, Dr McCabe reported improvements in the School and specifically referred to the painting of the dormitories, classrooms and corridors in 1951 and the installation of central heating in October of that year. In 1952, she noted the acquisition of a field from the primary school for recreational use by the industrial school children. In March 1953, Dr McCabe commented that 'lots remain to be done yet'. She noted in that year that there was still no recreation hall. She also remarked that the Resident Manager was very kind, but tired and in need of a change, however she noted that the assistant nun was very good to the children. She reported that the nuns were concerned about the falling numbers in the School.
- 11.50** In April 1955, Dr McCabe recorded in her Report that the School had improved and that the Resident Manager was anxious to further improve conditions. She also noted that the children looked well cared for.
- 11.51** On 19th January, on her first of three visits in 1956, she noted that the School continued to improve and that the children were much improved since attending the national school in Dundalk. They were well fed and clothed. Again, she commented on the fact that the children had no indoor play hall and could only play in the field attached to the primary school. On her second visit, on 14th May 1956, she remarked that the School was well run and that the Resident Manager and Sister in charge were kind and good to the children. She pointed out 'whilst the school is good and there is little fault to find, there is a little lack of initiative in running it'. She noted that the children now had a play hall but she added that more could be done with this space to make it attractive and bright. In August 1956, she again noted that the School was well run and the children well cared for, and she further noted that the Resident Manager was to make improvements in the play hall.
- 11.52** In 1957, the School received two visits from Dr McCabe. The first, in February, noted that the School was well run and that the nuns in charge were very kind and good. Again, she wrote of her aspirations for improvements in the recreation hall, saying 'it just requires a little initiative to get things going'. The following June, which Dr McCabe referred to as an 'incidental visit', she noted that the School was well run and that improvements were certainly taking place but that a lot remained to be done.
- 11.53** In her report of March 1958, however, a more critical tone emerged. She remarked that the School was well run but not as efficient as it could be. Again, she made reference to the lack of initiative on the part of management in making changes in the School. She referred to the children using the field from the national school for play and not having facilities on their own premises. The Department Inspector, Mr Sugrue, visited the School in September 1958, and wrote a report. The main purpose of his visit appeared to have been the lack of recreational facilities in the School. He stated that he was 'quite satisfied with the general catering for the children's welfare apart

from recreational facilities', adding that, 'There is a great need for a Recreational Hall and for better facilities for outdoor games and pastimes'. He went on to say that he had discussed this need with the Reverend Mother and the other nuns in charge of running the Industrial School, including the Resident Manager and the Sister in charge, pointing out to her that such improvements in recreational facilities had not been pressed upon the School greatly, due to the low level of the grant, but now that the grants had been increased substantially, he was insisting on efforts being made to remedy these defects. He suggested converting part of the old vacant national school buildings into a recreational hall, and the playground attached to the national school could be made available as a playground. He also pointed out that the children could use two tennis courts adjacent to the School. Having discussed these ideas with the nuns in question, he found them to be enthusiastic about carrying out his suggested improvements.

11.54 After Mr Sugrue's visit, Dr McCabe inspected the School in October 1958, and found that there was great activity going on in the School, with many of Mr Sugrue's suggestions being rapidly put into practice. She noted that the new Reverend Mother was very enthusiastic and co-operative. Also, she noted that an opera was being organised for Christmas.

11.55 The year 1959 saw three inspections of the School by Dr McCabe, in March, May and June, although she issued just one report. In it, she stated that the School was very well run and that many improvements had been made and continued to be made.

Conditions in the School in the 1960s as revealed by Medical Inspections

11.56 Again on 29th and 30th April 1960, Dr McCabe referred to continued improvements but was characteristically vague. For example, she said that much needed to be done, but it was hoped that changes would be carried out in time. She felt that the Resident Manager and staff were willing and co-operative and she found the Resident Manager kind and attentive. The same comments were made in January 1961, that the School was well run and that improvements had been made and continued to be made. In 1962, she considered the School was still well run. Redecoration had been completed. She noted again that the Resident Manager was very kind. After a second inspection in September 1962, she again said the School was being very well run and the Resident Manager very capable. The falling numbers were of concern to the Resident Manager. Dr McCabe also remarked that she had visited the sea-side residence of the School and found 'all very well and enjoying the holiday'. In 1963, there were four visits by the Medical Inspector to the School. After these visits, she found the School again to be very well run, with the Resident Manager being very capable and kind and interested in the children, and noted that she had done her best to make any improvements that were suggested.

11.57 Following Dr McCabe's departure from her post in 1965, Dr Lysaght carried out a full inspection on 24th March 1966. In his lengthy report he remarked that:

There is a kindly & intimate atmosphere in this comparatively small school which makes up for its old fashioned & rough furniture and equipment. The fact that the numbers are low and the buildings not fully occupied tend to make it feel bland by comparison with more compact building or one in which all the rooms are occupied. Much could be done to bring it up to date by way of say modern beds.

Conditions in the School in the 1970s as revealed by Departmental Inspections

11.58 The next inspection, by Dr Lysaght, did not take place until November 1971. The state of affairs existing in the School at that time are outlined with some acerbity as follows:

Two elderly nuns are mainly responsible for the running of this school, both spent practically all their religious life in this one school on this same work ... It seems as if the school staggered on for years with little interest or encouragement from the Department.

It was left to the Sisters themselves to make a break-through when, in 1967, they embarked on major works of alterations and improvements. I understand that was primarily sparked off by the election, in 1966, of a new Reverend Mother, who has given this work her whole-hearted interest, sympathy and practical support. Until her arrival, (two sisters) admitted to me that they felt this school was virtually a barracks!

11.59 In April 1973, the Inspector noted the change in the type of child who was resident there, remarking in his report on the fact that ‘Dundalk seems to have more than its quota of slow learners and retarded pupils’.

11.60 The report of March 1976 is very complimentary of the work of the Resident Manager, in achieving a high degree of stability for the children and in creating a warm and friendly environment for them. Interestingly, the Department Inspector noted:

This establishment is a text book example of the people playing the more important role than the building.

The children were all very happy and relaxed with their staff both Lay and Religious – they were able to talk and play freely without any inhibitions.

11.61 Contrasting views were expressed by Department Inspectors. Dr Lysaght amended his 1976 report in complimentary remarks:

This was a worthwhile and valid visit where one could state objectively that the present Child Care practices are geared towards the interest of the children, there is a healthy happy atmosphere ...

11.62 However, when the School was next inspected by Mr Graham Granville in February 1977 he was very critical:

the Resident Manager ... has endeavoured to operate a residential children’s home for a very long time now under extremely exacting and formidable conditions within her own community ... is now showing signs of being a sick person and tired. The children are not suffering unduly at present, nevertheless, the future is very uncertain, and I would see a grave risk to the children’s safety if there were to be fire, and combine this lack of enthusiasm towards the children’s social and academic development and one has certain crucial problems, that cannot be over looked.

11.63 The Department’s view of the School in an internal memorandum dated February 1977 considered the School to be inadequate on a number of fronts. It listed the concerns of the Department, namely the condition of the outside of the building; the need for decorating the inside; the inadequate maintenance of health records; contact with local schools; assessment procedures; co-operation with social workers; contact with parents; and the very inadequate fire precautions. The list of requirements was considered formidable, and the Department saw it as a matter of urgency to decide what had to be done with the School. Because of these factors and the falling numbers, the eventual decision taken was to close the School, which came about in 1983.

Life in the School

11.64 Elaine, a witness who spent her entire childhood from aged three to 16 years in the Institution in the 1940s and 1950s, was able to recall the living conditions. She was born in a home for unmarried mothers in Dublin and, at the age of three, transferred to St Joseph’s as a voluntary admission. Her earliest memories of the School were from age seven. She described life in the School as being ‘*dull ... grey. Nobody cared ... The food was awful*’. She said there was very little meat and the dinners consisted mainly of soup and potatoes.

11.65 She criticised the clothing. She was given a set of summer clothes in April that had to last right through until September and October, with the result that she was often frozen. Her dress was made of calico. All the children suffered from chilblains. The jumpers and stockings which the children knitted themselves did not keep them warm in the outside yard where they spent a lot of time. They wore their winter coats only when they went for walks on Sundays.

11.66 She described the daily chores that the children were required to do. She explained that every child was given a chore that was her special responsibility:

There was two lasses looked after the kitchen ... Other girls would ... look after the convent ... There was one lassie that had the laundry ... We all had chores. Some had the kitchen duties, some was cleaning up the pantries and things like that. Mine was the youngsters, there wouldn't have been many, not in today's terms. It seemed an awful lot then and it seemed a big chore. You had to look after them. You combed their hair, you fine combed their hair and make sure there was no nits and things like that. We didn't have any toothbrushes so we didn't have to look after our teeth ...

11.67 She began this 'child minding children' from the age of about 10 or 11. She went on to explain the system:

We would have lived on landings. Well there was the first landing, second and third landing. Mine would have been the charges on the third landing, they were the younger people ... They would have been maybe two to seven.

11.68 Elaine recollected that, when Dr McCabe would visit, everything would be lovely and clean. The beds would be dressed to perfection and the children would receive eggs twice a week for a few weeks prior to the visit by the Medical Inspector.

11.69 She spoke positively of the 'Fairy Godmother' system, introduced in the early 1950s, which was a programme for people from the area to take the children in the Institution out for an afternoon and take them to tea. They would also visit them at Christmas and Easter. She spoke with fondness of the godmother to whom she was sent. She also spoke favourably of the summer holidays spent at the nuns' house in Carlingford. She recalled that, at the holiday home in Carlingford, there were some lovely nuns who did not work in the Institution.

Physical abuse

11.70 The position of the Congregation was that the first time they became aware of complaints about St Joseph's was in October 1999, with the publication of *Suffer the Little Children* by Eoin O'Sullivan and Mary Raftery. In their Opening Statement the Congregation submitted:

Allegations of abuse from former residents of St Joseph's came as a source of deep shock to us, and particularly to the Sisters of the Dundalk Community, a number of whom had worked in the industrial school over the years, and were in regular contact with many former residents.

11.71 They went on to say:

Former residents differ in their memory of the use of corporal punishment during their time in St Joseph's. Some have painful memories of it and say they experienced it as excessive, others say it was not. While it is denied that excessive punishment was used in St Joseph's, given the number of years covered by the period under review, together with the number of children in residence, it is unlikely that corporal punishment was not sometimes administered unfairly or harshly.

- 11.72** Elaine spoke of 'harshness'. She recounted several instances of beatings. One occasion was when she asked the then Resident Manager if she could sit the scholarship examinations for the secondary school. She was bright and loved school. When she made her request the Resident Manager 'beat [her] within an inch of [her] life for taking that scholarship from people outside'.
- 11.73** The worst part was the fear of the punishment, and the waiting to be punished. She described one nun as 'very rough ... for an old nun' and added:
- She would give you six of the best and you would be lined up for half an hour before you got the six of the best, so the trauma of waiting to be punished and then being punished.*
- They could be punished for little or nothing, for talking after lights out at bedtime:
- It didn't have to be anything in particular ... Because ... we were always told we were bold anyway so it didn't matter.*
- 11.74** She recalled two other occasions when she was beaten. One was when she was aged 12 or 14 years and was in charge of younger children on a walk. Because she was unable to time the walk, they went too far away and returned hours late and she was beaten with a stick. The second occasion was when young children in her care contracted ringworm and she was beaten for that.
- 11.75** She also complained of being struck by a member of the lay staff, one of a number of young women from a domestic college in the west of Ireland who were sent to St Joseph's on work placement for approximately one year.
- 11.76** The witness recalled this lay staff member as being very rough with the children:
- But she would often get a child and she would pull her by the hair and swing her, only the wall would stop the person. They would go sliding down. She broke every brush we ever had in the house. We didn't have many ... She would be murdering them, using them as rulers. She just flogged people. When she left the place, and she was only there for a year, there wasn't a brush in the place when she left.*
- 11.77** The children did not complain about this staff member and she completed her placement. The witness explained that there was no one to complain to:
- I don't think that any of us had the knowledge or the wherewithal to complain. We were at these people's mercy.*
- 11.78** On the other hand, although physical punishment from the nuns was not as severe, she found what she called the psychological abuse more damaging:
- I wish sometimes they would have beaten the living daylight out of me, it would have been easier, but the psychological abuse, it stays forever and ever and ever.*
- 11.79** Jane,³ who was resident in the Institution in the late 1960s and early 1970s, gave evidence of being caned frequently by the Resident Manager. She admitted that she was 'a bit on the wild side', and got into trouble in the school. Jane further stated that the Resident Manager who punished her was also very good to her.
- Rules and regulations on corporal punishment**
- 11.80** An unusual feature of St Joseph's, Dundalk is the existence of a punishment book, which covers the period 1888 to 1950. The Institution is unique among Sisters of Mercy industrial schools in being able to produce such a record. There is no explanation for its discontinuation in 1950.

³ This is a pseudonym.

- 11.81** Punishment books were required by the regulations governing industrial schools, but there was a failure generally to comply with this requirement. They were intended to control the level of corporal punishment administered and should have had an impact on the nature of the punishments given.
- 11.82** If the book is an accurate record, it indicates minimal use of corporal punishment and employment of a range of deprivations for misconduct by children, but the evidence before the Committee casts doubt on the completeness of the information in the punishment book. Girls could be beaten on the spot and capriciously by all staff members, and none of that was recorded.
- 11.83** The Sisters of Mercy, in preparing for the St Joseph's hearings, obtained information 'from people who had contact with St Joseph's in the period under review, including former staff, residents, professionals, Sisters of St Malachy's Community, former Superiors of the convent, volunteers and neighbours'. The Opening Statement summarised the information obtained from these sources:
- Former staff acknowledge that moderate corporal punishment was used in St Joseph's for misdemeanours, disobedience, insolence, unruliness, bullying, and deny that it was ever deliberately excessive. The hand, a ruler, stick or cane was used. Normally the Resident Manager administered the punishment, and this was done in her office, or in a room called St Brigid's parlour. Both of the Resident Managers disapproved of any member of staff using any form of corporal punishment on the children, and clearly made this known, not only in the industrial school but also in the local primary school. Regrettably this was not always adhered to, and one member of staff remembers being reprimanded for slapping a girl who had spat at one of the Sisters. It is also recalled that a member of staff found mistreating a child was not retained in the school.
- Former residents differ in their memory of the use of corporal punishment during their time in St Joseph's. Some have painful memories of it and say they experienced it as excessive, others say that it was not. While it is denied that excessive punishment was used in St Joseph's given the number of years covered by the period under review, together with the number of children in residence, it is unlikely that corporal punishment was not sometimes administered unfairly or harshly.
- 11.84** Sr McQuaid reiterated the point at the Phase I hearing:
- I suppose knowing human nature and knowing the length of the period of time and the number of children I think it would be unrealistic to say that there weren't times when a child could have been treated harshly.*
- 11.85** In her evidence during Phase III, Sr McQuaid described an instance that occurred in the 1950s, when a member of staff beat the children with a hairbrush. She was reported by one of the senior girls to the Resident Manager who subsequently dismissed her. The evidence of Elaine was that one abusive lay worker who beat the children with a hairbrush remained for the duration of her placement and would not have been due to be retained in any event.
- 11.86** Sr McQuaid apologised to '*anybody who suffered either because of unmerited or excessive punishment, either from a Sister or from ones that we didn't even notice*'. With hindsight, they said they deeply regretted the use of corporal punishment. They realised that even when it was not excessive, it must have had a greater impact upon a child living in an institution.
- 11.87** The rules governing corporal punishment were strict. In no circumstances was it permitted to be inflicted on a girl over 15 years and, for those under that age, it was reserved to the Manager or authorised person. From 1946, the Department of Education's policy was that corporal punishment was a course of last resort and only for grave transgressions.

11.88 The Congregation stated that there was an emphasis on occupation and regimentation as a means of management and control of the children, ‘particularly in the 1940s and 1950s when the numbers of children were large’. It accepted that the impact on the children would have been restrictive and frustrating, but said that the atmosphere became more relaxed when numbers decreased in the period 1960 to 1983. It is interesting to note, nevertheless, that the staff-child ratio in the period 1940 to 1983 was 1:9, which was much better than the norm for the time:

There were usually three Sisters and employed staff and that wasn’t counting the staff who came in, Sisters who came in in the morning and the evening, so it was amazing that it was that.

Sisters of Mercy Records: Annual Reports 1934–1958

11.89 Records provided by the Sisters of Mercy include yearly reports written by the Resident Manager, giving a brief account of the activities of the School and running from 1934 to 1958, after which the practice appears to have ceased. The reports gave an overview of life in the School for each year under different headings: education/literary instruction, industrial training, fire drill, recreation, home leave, conduct of pupils, buildings and equipment, and aftercare.

11.90 Under the heading ‘conduct of pupils’, details of the punishment of pupils was described in general terms. There was rarely mention of physical punishment: the most usual punishment was deprivation of certain activities or treats, such as an after-dinner sweet or the weekly walk, depending on the seriousness of the misdemeanour.

11.91 The information was of a very general nature with some statistical material. These reports were the only contemporary record of life in the School, and the information recorded is unfortunately of limited value and varies little from year to year.

The punishment book

11.92 The punishment book covered the period from 1888 to 1950. At the opening public hearing (Phase I), Sr McQuaid said that the punishment book was still in existence but that it had not been filled in after 1950. She explained:

Yes, we did have the book, which we gave to the Commission, but it was blank. And I must say I would have had the question that is probably in your mind, why it was blank. I don’t have an answer, except that I am conscious that in the couple of other institutions that I am aware of that had Punishment Books theirs seem to have ended in the 1950s as well.

11.93 The entries in the book were recorded under headings such as the date, the name of the pupil, the offence committed by the pupil, who reported the offence, the punishment, and remarks on the case.

11.94 Offences warranting punishment included the following:

- being insubordinate and disrespectful to teacher.
- taking fruit from the pantry.
- showing disregard to directions.
- going out to visit relations without permission.
- Giving unnecessary trouble and showing insubordination.
- taking money from past pupil without leave.
- wasting time during literary work and showing insubordination to teacher.
- leaving school and going up town without permission.

- taking pocket money from another child and spending it without permission.
- showing disregard for directions and taking correction badly.
- tampering with keys.
- disobeying school rules and defying teacher.
- being insolent on different occasions – disregarding orders given by the sisters and being disrespectful to teachers.
- refusing to go to recreation.

11.95 The book in many cases recorded that no punishment was imposed and, where punishment was decided upon, the forms of reprimand included being:

- kept from Sunday walk,
- deprived of Sunday outing,
- deprived of Pictures Matinee,
- Placed at the Junior Table in Dining Hall,
- deprived of day at the Sea.

11.96 Physical punishment was recorded as slapping by the Sister in charge or the Resident Manager. Six entries of slapping as a form of punishment were recorded in the book. For the most part, punishment was deprivation of some kind. In this regard, the book's authenticity as a record is not consistent with the witnesses who spoke of corporal punishment as being much more pervasive.

11.97 There is no evidence that Inspectors systematically inspected the punishment book.

11.98 The question is whether the book is an accurate and complete record of discipline in the Institution up to 1950. If it is, it demonstrates the benefits of an ordered system, in which the Resident Manager exercised independent judgment and a flexible approach to punishment. It is clear, however, that it does not contain any record of informal or casual chastisement by nuns or lay staff, and the existence of such other modes of punishment undermined the justice of the formal system.

11.99 Emmett,⁴ who was in St Joseph's as a boy from the early 1970s, described a frightening ordeal to which he was subjected in a very cruel punishment, when he was put into a small cupboard known as 'the black hole':

The black hole is an area which is situated in the basement of the convent, right beside the kitchen area. It is about three, maybe four by four square, and in height also. It is totally black. One was thrown into there kicking and screaming, not wanting to go there, terrified and wanting to get out because it is not a nice thing to go into and just being left there all night.

Myself and my brother were put in there. Why I can't recall. I was terrified being put in there, kicking and screaming, wanting to be let out ... whatever I have done wrong sorry, just let me out, let me out. My brother also tried to calm me down but I almost turned my anger out onto him ... all I knew was that this is totally wrong and bad to be done and there is nothing one could do about it. One kicked at the door to be let out and only to be told that if you keep kicking on the door you are going to stay in there much longer. It could be five minutes and at the time it was all night. An incident which happened in which I was in there all night on my own, Sr Sienna⁵ put me in there ... In the early hours, it must have been six around o'clock ... I heard a noise outside and I thought it was Sr

⁴ This is a pseudonym.

⁵ This is a pseudonym.

Sienna and I said, “please let me out. I will be good, I am sorry for whatever I have done”, only for one of the kitchen staff to open the door and say to me, “what are you doing in there?” Naturally I would be so scared to say it to her, because I wouldn’t want to get her into trouble because God knows what the nuns would do to her. She says, “well okay I’ll let you out but don’t tell the nuns that I have let you out.” I would have clambered out of it and crept and went straight upstairs to my bed. That would be one of the worst times that it happened.

Another time ... I did kick and push the door to get out but Sr Sienna opened the door and gave me a slap, and of course gave (my brother) a slap just as bad ...

11.100 The ‘black hole’ may have been an alternative to corporal punishment, but this boy was so terrified by being locked in that dark recess that the experience was akin to psychological torture for him, as the nun must have known and intended.

11.101 He also recalled a humiliating incident when he was put into a girl’s dress by the Resident Manager, who paraded him throughout the School in front of all the other children and staff. He was about five years old at the time when this incident happened.

11.102 • **There was no evidence of dependence on corporal punishment to control children. There was an effort to make it a punishment of last resort, and the fact that the School maintained a punishment book for a considerable period of time indicates an intention to regulate corporal punishment. It also provides evidence that other forms of correction, such as losing privileges or being demoted, were used. Unfortunately, an informal system also operated, sometimes cruel, that undermined the value of the formal policy.**

11.103 Sample extract from punishment book

Date	Offence	By Whom Reported	Punishment	Remarks on the Case
August 1947	Disobedient, sulky and muttering when corrected. Troublesome to the Sisters in P. School.	Principal Teacher and also Miss A. ⁶	Kept from going to see Procession and celebration of St Patrick’s Centenary.	These 5 girls seem to be leagued together to give trouble.
September 1947	Refused to do her charge. Impertinent to teacher.	Miss B. ⁷	Just insisted on its being done.	
September 1947	Attacked each other quarrelling over something	In the presence of all the children in Dining Hall.	[Pupil] slapped by Sister Sienna.	Not much improvement.
October 1947	Separated from teacher when out walking, went a different road.	Teacher who was in charge.	Not allowed out following Sunday.	

⁶ This is a pseudonym.

⁷ This is a pseudonym.

Date	Offence	By Whom Reported	Punishment	Remarks on the Case
October 1947	Left school without permission in early morning. Went out to the country.	Missed by everyone. Had to be followed by teachers in a motor.	No punishment given.	
October 1947	Hid all day in the attic. Only missed when the children came to dinner.	Missed from dining, then reported to Guards.	No punishment given.	

Neglect and emotional abuse

11.104 The Congregation does not dispute the evidence that there was neglect for a period in the 1940s at St Joseph's. It acknowledges with regret the criticisms contained in the 1944 and 1946 Reports by the Department of Education Inspector. It points out, however, that after 1946 conditions improved and the neglect of the earlier years never re-emerged in St Joseph's. In making this assertion, it relies on the Inspection Reports after 1946.

11.105 The Sisters of Mercy also acknowledged the failure to meet the educational needs of the children and conceded that, 'it is undoubtedly the case that the method of education provided was inadequate for the needs of many of the children'. They accepted the fact that many of the girls left the School with only a basic level of primary education. The Congregation also recognised the resentment of many former pupils that they had been given narrow employment opportunities. They further conceded 'the full potential of many of the children in the school 'was not realised, and that this has caused great suffering'.

11.106 The witness complained about being belittled:

I always remember (the teacher) would say you are the lowest of the low, you are the worst of the worst. We would often go out to the grass and try to see what the lowest low was, how low could you put your hands ... That was constant. We were never encouraged to think beyond the four walls that we were in.

11.107 The staff did not do what the children needed in order to feel secure and loved:

it was the psychological abuse that was generally meted out because people didn't see children as children. We weren't people, we were kind of fodder and nobody thought enough to give us a hug or love us, or do anything that would have made our lives better. ... I am not saying they were psychologically abusive. What I am saying is that they didn't know how to look after children, they took on a job they were incapable of doing.

11.108 Elaine summed up how she felt on leaving St Joseph's with the simple phrase, 'we were there for the duration and turfed out on the streets then'.

11.109 She could forgive the poor food and conditions, but found it hard to forgive the emotional abuse and lack of love shown to the children:

But the food was bad. Although I don't blame the nuns on the food, I don't blame them in that. In my own reading in history we did have the war and there was the rations, I don't blame them for that. What I always get annoyed with and I find no forgiveness was the psychological abuse and the lack of love. That would have cost them nothing. A kind word. But there was that constant – we were psychologically abused, like, whatever it was about poor unmarried mothers. I am glad it doesn't happen today.

Separation from family and loss of identity

11.110 Issues of identity and family featured prominently in the evidence of all three complainants.

11.111 Elaine was born in a home for unmarried mothers and transferred at the age of three years to St Joseph's, where she remained until she reached 16. When her first child was born, she began to search for information about her own mother, a quest which continued on and off for 30 years, with the help of her children. At the end of her search, in the mid-1990s, an elderly nun in St Joseph's produced from her papers a letter written by the witness's mother 50 years earlier, and this letter was sent to her along with other papers released on threat of court proceedings. This letter was a source of comfort and reassurance, and eased the sense of abandonment experienced by the witness down through the years. She explained:

Well, my belief is that I was transferred to St Joseph's Orphanage in Dundalk and my mother was never told. The only reason I know she was never told was because later on in 1946 she writes to the convent and she is looking to know where her daughter is. She is wanting to know would they mind if [she] sent me a little something ... I just believe that she should have been told ... It is the only letter. But she is quite upset about it, she's heartbroken in that letter. There is one line in it that says "next thing I know the baby is gone". That jumps out any time I read it.

11.112 Elaine was resentful that society had enforced the separation of mother and child because of its intolerance of illegitimacy. She was also told erroneously that her mother was dead. In fact, she died much later and could have seen her grandchildren. She recalled being told that her mother was dead and experiencing no reaction. She said, *'What do you do? I mean I'd never had a mother up to that. I didn't cry or I don't remember crying. They were just words'*.

11.113 Sr Sienna who had been Resident Manager had meticulously retained papers relating to the witness, including this letter. Elaine was grateful that the Sister had preserved them but was frustrated when she would not hand them over. Only the threat of court proceedings forced their production. There was no understanding that children needed and were entitled to information about their families. She said:

Originally when my first baby was born, and that would have been in the mid 1960s, I had gone back to the orphanage because the orphanage was still open and I was literally told to get on with my life. I wasn't told who I was or anything like that. I did want to know because I had a child then and motherly instincts must have told me I had a mother and she must have had some feelings too.

11.114 She greatly treasured the letter which recorded her mother's concern:

... I was absolutely thrilled to get it. Even though it hurts it is a letter that – I will always treasure it, it is heartbreaking. She couldn't tell anyone, she was like myself she was alone. I did better than her I ended up with a family I could have. I do treasure the letter it says a lot. It says little but it says an awful lot. As I say, there is one line in it "the next thing I know the baby is gone". She doesn't know and it is heartbreaking that somebody could take her child and not tell her.

11.115 Jane was originally detained with her sister and a cousin in an industrial school in the West of Ireland. She was transferred first to the Midlands, and then to St Joseph's, without her other family members. The reason for this separation was not apparent. The result was a complete loss of contact with her sister and cousin. When asked about them she replied, *'I really don't know now, they probably just made their own way on over to England or Australia, whatever'*.

11.116 Emmett was one of a large family, all but one of whom were sent to industrial schools. He was in St Joseph's for five years, and was less than four years of age on admission. He went on to

another institution, about which he was positive in his recollections, but described how he had become institutionalised, with consequent difficulties in maintaining relationships, including those with his brothers and sisters.

11.117 He described his need to form attachments, and he expressed this in a letter he wrote in 1986 to the Resident Manager:

I was just thinking to myself, as I have always thought, of that I can never say that I never had a mother and father because I have had that, and that's you and Fr Burke.⁸ Just like all mums and dads, you fed me, clothed me, taught me to read and write, brought me on holidays. I will never forget and loads more and I love you both and always will.

11.118 He was asked if he stood by those sentiments today and he replied:

Yes, I would ... Fr Burke ... I wish he was my dad, because I loved him so much. He's one in a million ... Sr Sienna as much as there is a lot of good fond memories, and I stand over the letter and those words I have said in it ... there is a lot of good but yet there is bad ... I thought she was so good and the next minute she turned bad, by locking me in the black hole and humiliating me and embarrassing me and hitting me in her office.

11.119 He was eloquent in describing his yearning for a family life he never had. He said:

Father Burke was very affectionate and you would get a hug from him and so forth, but naturally children need ... more than that, more loving and to be wanted. As all children would, as anybody in general does. I felt I wasn't getting that ... I felt that it was an uphill battle on my own against all the other environments ... just doing what father tells you to go to school at this time and you come back at this time, go to bed at this time. That's fine, because one is institutionalised ... I find it easy to work in these environs, because I have been brought up in them. If I had joined the army I would have had no problems. But moving into ... the normal world, it is totally different. Naturally I would see the bond of family that [the family that befriended me] have with their daughter ... it is so beautiful that it is something that I wanted to express but I didn't know where to express it. I just found that very, very difficult.

11.120 Even relationships with his fellow pupils from St Joseph's proved transient. He explained:

The funny part about it all, living so long in [another industrial school] and so long in St Joseph's I am in contact with none of them ... all children were put into institutions but they weren't made to feel together, to be integrated more so, so they can bond good relations. Now, when I try to bond relations with the children ... one would have been slowly doing it. Next minute ... you are cast right out of it. I have never seen any of the girls or the school since then, until the school closed down. The only contact that there would be with your peers, to the nuns ... The problem with this is that I am going through a third party.

11.121 He then gave a moving description of his ideal of family life, something he had never had. He said:

(The family) is the foundation of their (children's) life and if they have as many of their siblings and their uncles and aunts and moms and dads and grandparents and whoever else all round them, they will have so much love the strength that will come from that that they will be a much stronger person. The confidence will be very strong and the self-esteem will be very strong and nothing will hurt them. I believe that to the fullest.

⁸ This is a pseudonym.

Limited nature of the Investigation

- 11.122** While 21 written statements of complaint were submitted to the Investigation Committee, only three former residents came forward to give evidence.
- 11.123** There were no living respondents, and no evidence was heard from people who had worked in the School. The material that was therefore available was a limited amount of oral testimony and the information contained in the written records.

General conclusions

- 11.124**
- 1. The relatively small number of children in St Joseph's was an important factor in making this a less abusive institution.**
 - 2. The buildings were extremely cold, unfriendly and forbidding, 'a barracks' before 1960, and attempts to improve them made little impact.**
 - 3. The children were poorly educated and trained, and their full potential was not realised.**
 - 4. Family contacts were not maintained and children were deprived of crucial information that would have helped them form family ties and establish identity.**
 - 5. For most of its existence, recreational facilities were almost non-existent. The children were kept occupied by doing daily chores. The need for children to play was not considered by management. This regime harmed their emotional development.**
 - 6. The children came from deprived backgrounds and the conditions did little to help them.**
 - 7. The punishment book, even though it is not a complete record, is evidence of an attempt to control corporal punishment.**
 - 8. Problems arose from time to time in this Institution because of the incapacity of a Resident Manager, by reason of old age and/or infirmity. The management system of the Congregation was slow to remedy the situation. The Department of Education was limited to exhortation and threat, but was unable to effect the necessary change because the Mother Superior appointed the Resident Managers.**
 - 9. There was neglect of children in 1944 and 1946, including gross indifference to hygiene, where the children were left with 'verminous and nitty heads'.**
 - 10. Despite the forbidding environment and the fear induced by some punishments, the children did not live in constant fear. The Sisters, particularly in the latter years, were more approachable and involved. A small anecdote told by Sr Ann Marie McQuaid illustrates this point: when Inspection Reports said the School needed painting, the Sisters ran bazaars and collected door to door in Dundalk and Dublin to fund the cost; they could afford the paint but not a painter, so four of the Sisters, including the Reverend Mother and the Resident Manager, two Sisters from the School and the caretaker of the convent, painted the building from basement to top floor at night-time; a former resident told her that they used to creep out of bed to see the nuns without their veils.**