

Chapter 10

Our Lady of Succour Industrial School, Newtownforbes ('Newtownforbes'), 1869–1969

Introduction

- 10.01** Newtownforbes was chosen as the first module for investigation by the Committee because, at that time, there were just six complaints made against the School. The scheduling of the hearings was halted, however, by the review process in 2003. Much of the evidence had already been gathered, and discovery directions had been issued to the Department of Education and Science, the Sisters of Mercy, the Bishop of Ardagh and Clonmacnoise and three of the complainant witnesses in 2002. Two procedural hearings took place in 2002 regarding variation of the discovery directions issued to the Department of Education and Science and the Sisters of Mercy respectively. The first procedural hearing was at the instigation of the Sisters of Mercy and was held in private on 14th November 2002. The second procedural hearing was at the instigation of the Department of Education and it also took place in private on 6th December 2002.
- 10.02** Five complainants were heard by the Investigation Committee.

Background

- 10.03** Newtownforbes was certified as an industrial school for girls in 1869. The Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy managed the School from that date until its closure in 1969. As with all other industrial schools, Newtownforbes was regulated by the Department of Education.
- 10.04** The establishment of the Industrial School in Newtownforbes was brought about by the then local landlord, Lord Granard, and the Sisters of Mercy from the convent in Longford. In 1869, Lord Granard invited the Sisters of Mercy to establish an orphanage for abandoned children and a school to educate the poor of the town. To this end, he obtained the certification for the Industrial School from the Department of Education on 29th November 1869, one month in advance of the Sisters of Mercy arriving there. Three Sisters from the convent in Longford were sent to Newtownforbes under the direction of the then Bishop of Ardagh and Clonmacnoise, Dr McCabe. They arrived on 13th December 1869. Lord Granard provided the Sisters with a vacant house and gardens rent-free, in addition to an annual cash donation of £90.
- 10.05** The Sisters established St. Michael's Convent in the house provided by Lord Granard, and this convent became autonomous from the Longford Convent in 1871. The Sisters then embarked on a large building project, which by 1879 consisted of the Industrial School, a day school, a laundry and dormitories on the grounds. These buildings were added to over the years. In 1904, an 11-acre farm was acquired by the Sisters in Newtownforbes across the road from the convent on the main Dublin to Sligo road. A bakery was also in operation on the grounds. In 1913, a further 15.5 acres were obtained through the Land Commission in the adjoining townland of Carrickmoyragh

which was beside the convent. Also, in 1913, the laundry was expanded and new machinery was installed.

- 10.06** Until 1942, the Industrial School had its own internal primary school. However, in 1942, the internal primary school was closed and the industrial school children from then on attended the external primary school, which was also run by the Newtownforbes Sisters. This change was made presumably in response to the Cussen Report recommendations.
- 10.07** In 1951, a secondary school was established at Newtownforbes, which also became a boarding school. When the Industrial School closed in 1969, the boarding school took over parts of the building.

Numbers

- 10.08** In 1869, the School was certified for the reception of 145 girls, but with accommodation provision for 240. The School received children committed by the courts, children placed by local authorities under the Public Assistance Acts, and later the Health Acts, and it also accepted voluntary admissions.
- 10.09** The number of children in residence in the School fluctuated from year to year. Over the period 1940 to 1969, approximately 320 children passed through the School. The highest number of girls recorded in the School during the period under consideration was in 1948, when there were 175 girls in total in the School, of whom 159 were committed through the courts, nine placed under the Public Assistance Acts, and the remaining seven were voluntary admissions. After 1948, the numbers in the School began to steadily decline. In 1953, there were 126 girls in total in the School, of whom 101 were court committals, 18 were placed under the Public Assistance Acts, and seven were voluntary admissions. This number dropped to 94 in 1955, which consisted of 73 court committals, 14 Public Assistance cases and seven voluntary admissions. Then, in 1958, the numbers further dropped to 68 in total, which consisted of 47 court committals, 14 Public Assistance cases and seven voluntary admissions. By 1969, when the School closed, there were only five pupils resident in the School.
- 10.10** The decline in numbers was of major concern to the Resident Manager of Newtownforbes in the 1950s and 1960s. It became such a concern to her that she sought to increase the numbers by having young boys admitted to the School. In 1956, the Resident Manager wrote to the Department of Education seeking permission for the acceptance of boys under eight years of age. The Department Inspector had indicated that this would not be possible as there were already schools for young boys which were not full.
- 10.11** The majority of children who were sent to Newtownforbes came from Dublin, and in fact 60 percent of them were committed through the Children's Court in Dublin. The main reasons for the committal of these children included poverty, death of a parent, or being an illegitimate child. Poverty, in short, was the overriding reason for many of the admissions to the School.

Closure

- 10.12** The Industrial School closed on 31st August 1969. The Resident Manager, Sr Lucia,¹ wrote to the Department of Education on 27th August 1969 informing them of their intention to close the School at the end of the month. However, she had forgotten to provide the requisite six months' notice of intention to resign the certificate for the School, as required by section 48 of the Children Act, 1908. The Department therefore took the letter of 27th August 1969 as notification of resignation of the certificate of the School, the expiration of which took effect on 26th February 1970.

¹ This is a pseudonym.

10.13 The Resident Manager wrote to the Department on 19th September 1969, apologising for overlooking the requirement of six months' notice. In this letter, she pointed out that they had no option but to close the School because of the decline in numbers:

May I mention we very much regret having to close down "Our Lady of Succour School". It has been our principal work for almost 100 years, now, and the work we dearly loved, but with the great fall in numbers we were forced to do something about it. Now the whole building is fully occupied as secondary school classrooms.

10.14 At the time of closing, there were five pupils resident in the School. The two youngest girls were transferred to Moate Industrial School, and two others were returned to their respective fathers. The fifth girl was retained until the expiration of her committal term, with a view to sending her to nursing school in England.

10.15 The buildings which housed the Industrial School were subsequently subsumed by the secondary boarding school. The boarding school closed in 1987 and the property was sold in 1990. In that same year, the laundry was demolished and, by 1999, the convent and its grounds were sold and apartments were subsequently built on the site.

Finance

10.16 As Newtownforbes operated as an independent unit, it was responsible for its own financing and administration. The main source of income for the Industrial School was the capitation grants from the Department of Education. The Sisters of Mercy stated that their financial records showed that the School operated within a range of 5 percent of the money provided by the capitation grant. Another source of income for the Community was the laundry, which was a public laundry. The farm only provided limited income because of its small size. It did not even enable the School to be self-sufficient in milk, butter and vegetables. The boarding school also provided income to the Community and this amount increased over the years. There is no direct evidence to show how much the industrial school contributed financially to the Community in Newtownforbes.

10.17 It is clear, however, that the reduction in numbers in the Industrial School, from the late 1950s onwards, made the School uneconomical. The capitation system of funding was based on numbers in the Institution and when numbers fell, income dropped. The Resident Managers' Association consistently looked for increased capitation allowances when, in fact, that would have had limited impact on small schools such as Newtownforbes that had dramatic reductions in numbers.

Sources of information

10.18 Contemporaneous documentation for the time period under review was furnished from the following sources:

- the Department of Education and Science;
- the Sisters of Mercy;
- the Bishop of Ardagh and Clonmacnoise; and
- the Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children.

10.19 Garda statements, which were not available at the time of the hearings, were furnished in March 2005. The hearings were concluded in January 2005.

10.20 The Sisters of Mercy have little or no surviving administrative or management documentation in respect of Newtownforbes. Most of the surviving documentation furnished to the Investigation Committee by the Sisters of Mercy consisted of individual pupil files and medical reports. However, a set of documents entitled 'Report on School Activities' which covered the period 1938 to 1958

were furnished by the Sisters, and they provide additional information regarding the Industrial School. These reports were submitted annually to the Department of Education. The Sisters of Mercy also commissioned Dr Moira Maguire and Professor Séamus Ó Cinnéide to prepare a report on Newtownforbes, which was furnished to the Committee.

10.21 Oral testimony was available from five witnesses who had made complaints to the Investigation Committee about the Institution. Two respondent witnesses gave evidence to the Investigation Committee. They had worked in the Industrial School and the primary school respectively during the time period under review. The Provincial of the Western Province, which now includes Newtownforbes, gave general evidence in respect of the School. In addition, a number of witness statements from various members of the Sisters of Mercy who had worked in Newtownforbes during the time period were provided to the Investigation Committee. These persons were not named as respondents. They had worked primarily in the primary school but had had some contact with the Industrial School over the years in terms of supervision. A total of 13 such witness statements were furnished.

The witnesses

10.22 Originally, six complainant witnesses had lodged complaints to the Investigation Committee against Newtownforbes. At the time of the hearings, this number had fallen to five. Their combined periods of residence spanned from 1939 to 1965. Most of these witnesses spent their entire childhood in the School.

10.23 Three respondent witnesses had been due to give evidence to the Committee, but one was unable to do so because of illness. The two witnesses who did give evidence had spent long periods of time working in Newtownforbes. These witnesses were aged 84 and 85 years respectively at the time of the hearings. One of these witnesses, Sr Francesca², had worked exclusively in the Industrial School from 1946 to 1963. The other witness, Sr Elena³, had taught in the primary school from 1947 to 1963 and had no direct contact with the Industrial School itself.

10.24 Sr Margaret Casey, the Provincial of the Western Province of the Sisters of Mercy, gave evidence at the Phase I and Phase III public hearings in respect of Newtownforbes. As a child, she and her family lived directly across the road from the Industrial School at Newtownforbes, and they were therefore familiar with the children who attended there. In addition, she attended the same primary school as the industrial school children.

Management structure

10.25 The convent in Newtownforbes was an autonomous unit from 1871 to 1979. The nuns who worked in Newtownforbes were entirely responsible for the management, financing and administration of the School. In particular, the Resident Manager and the Sisters who worked in the School were appointed from the Newtownforbes convent, and no other source of staffing was available.

10.26 In 1979, there were six such independent Sisters of Mercy convents in operation in the diocese of Ardagh and Clonmacnoise. These six convents were subsumed into a single diocesan unit with a revised governance structure in 1979. This occurred with all the Sisters of Mercy convents that were in operation in all the dioceses throughout the country. In 1994, the 26 independent diocesan units in the country merged to become a single Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy, which is in existence to the present day. Within this organisation structure, there is one Congregational Leadership and a Provincial Leadership Team for each of the four Provinces in the State.

² This is a pseudonym.

³ This is a pseudonym.

Numbers in the convent

- 10.27** The Superior of the convent at Newtownforbes was also the Resident Manager of the Industrial School. One Resident Manager's period in office spanned 22 consecutive years, from 1947 until the closure of the School in 1969. All of the Resident Managers for the time period under review are deceased.
- 10.28** A total of 30 nuns were in the convent but, at any given time, approximately five or six of them were of retirement age and unavailable for work.
- 10.29** The number of nuns who worked in the Industrial School ranged from five, in 1935, to nine in the period from 1945 to 1955. The remaining nuns were involved in teaching in the primary and the secondary schools and working in the bakery, the public laundry and on the farm. Each nun who worked in the Industrial School had a designated role, such as looking after the babies, working in the kitchen and other duties. Only two Sisters worked full-time in the Industrial School from the mid-1940s to the 1960s, and they were responsible for the day-to-day care of the children. One of them was involved in the general running of the Industrial School, and the other was primarily concerned with the provision of clothing. These two nuns slept in the Industrial School itself.
- 10.30** No records exist as to the number of lay staff who worked in the Industrial School. The 1966 General Inspection report of the Medical Inspector, Dr Lysaght, who reported to the Department of Education, noted 'no lay helpers in this school'. At the Phase I public hearing, Sr Margaret Casey acknowledged that they had very little information on the number of lay staff, but said there appeared to have been '*at least one or two*'. She also acknowledged that, at different intervals, some former pupils remained on as lay staff and assisted the nuns in the Industrial School.

Ethos and organisation

- 10.31** A former nun, Sr Elena, who had taught in the primary school for a period of approximately 16 years, provided useful information on the workings of the Community and the interaction between the Reverend Mother and the Sisters:
- ... We ... had no say in anything in the Community. It was ruled, it was governed from the top, just a select few that's all.*
- 10.32** The upper echelon of the Community, she said, consisted of four nuns: the Reverend Mother, the Mother Assistant, the Bursar and the Novice Mistress. She referred to them as the '*elite*'. These four nuns, it seems, governed the workings of the entire Community of the Sisters of Mercy at Newtownforbes. The remaining Sisters outside this inner circle had no voice or authority regarding the operation of their Community. Sr Elena described the role played by the remaining Sisters as: '*you followed blindly and dumbly*'.
- 10.33** In effect, the organisational structure operating at Newtownforbes was a two-tier system, with the Reverend Mother and three other nuns at the top, and the remaining nuns at the base. As Sr Elena stated, '*You had the elite and you had the everyday folk*'.
- 10.34** She became disillusioned with this system and eventually left the Sisters of Mercy in 1973.
- 10.35** The ethos of the Sisters of Mercy lent itself to the creation of this two-tier system. One of the essential rules of the Sisters of Mercy was the vow of obedience. In particular, Rule 28 of the 1926 Constitution, which is replicated in Chapter 7 of the 1954 Constitution, states:

The Sisters are always to bear in mind that by the vow of obedience they have forever renounced their own will and resigned it to the direction of their Superiors. They are to obey the Mother Superior as holding her authority from God rather through love than from

servile fear. They shall love and respect her as their mother, without her permission they shall not perform public penances.

10.36 Rule 29 of the 1926 Constitution takes this a step further and states:

They are to execute without hesitation all the directions of the Mother Superior, whether in matters of great or little moment agreeable or disagreeable. They shall never murmur but with humility and spiritual joy carry the sweet yoke of Jesus Christ.

10.37 This rule meant each Sister was expected to follow unquestioningly the will of the Reverend Mother. In particular, it hindered her ability to question the system or to suggest improvements if she disagreed with certain aspects of the management and administration of the School. At the Phase III public hearing, Sr Casey was questioned on the impact that the vow of obedience had on a Sister's ability to question her Superior on how a school such as Newtownforbes was being run. Sr Casey conceded that it was not the done thing to question authority at that time. She said:

But it would have been true, as well, that out of the obedience that it wouldn't have been the accepted or the norm for somebody to complain to the person in authority about how the place was being run, because to do so would have been seen not merely as a kind of personal failing but it would also have shown that in some way that their inability to cope with the challenges of religious life.

10.38 Another consequence of this two-tier system was that background information on a child, when she was admitted, was not passed down the line to the Sisters working in the School. The theory behind this policy was that all children would be treated equally if personal details were not known, but it meant that children who came from particularly tragic or traumatic backgrounds received no special care or attention. This 'one size fits all' approach was not appropriate for meeting the emotional needs of children in care.

Physical abuse

Attitude of Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy

10.39 The Sisters of Mercy in their Opening Statement and in evidence at the Investigation Committee Phase I public hearing conceded that 'corporal punishment was a feature of industrial school life'. They also acknowledged that:

Slapping was the principal form of punishment administered with a cane or a stick by the sister in charge or on duty or in more extreme cases by the Resident Manager.

10.40 Furthermore, it was accepted that 'most children would have experienced corporal punishment at some time during their time in the industrial school'. This, they conceded would 'undoubtedly have had a traumatic effect on the children'. The Provincial of the Western Province of the Sisters of Mercy, Sr Casey, who gave evidence at the Phase I public hearing, also conceded that the regime in Newtownforbes was harsh and did not take into account the individual needs of the children. She said:

We also accept that some of the children who experienced this regime, not merely as harsh and impersonal, but that they experienced it as abusive and humiliating. We are deeply sorry that this is the situation and we would like to add our and share in the public apology already made earlier this year by our Congregation leader ... to the children who were in our industrial school and who are now adults if what they experienced was this.

10.41 Punishment could be administered by any member of staff and was not confined to the Resident Manager alone. Sr Casey said:

Corporal punishment was a feature of the life in the Industrial School, and the primary school, I suppose, as well. Slapping with the cane or a stick was the usual way that this corporal punishment would have been administered. It was usually administered by the person who was in charge, more often than not on the spot. In the primary school, which I can just speak of for myself, it would have been in the presence of other people. If it was a serious offence it was the Resident Manager that punished. I do know from speaking with the Sister who minded the small babies that she said that she couldn't slap, it was one of two other Sisters that could slap if a punishment was needed. But it is likely that most of the children that went through the school would have experienced corporal punishment at some stage.

10.42 Sr Casey also asserted that, from 1956 onwards, the Resident Manager forbade the novices to slap any of the children in the Industrial School.

10.43 Corporal punishment was inflicted by means of a stick or a cane. Sr Casey said that, in her experience from the primary school, the cane was not carried about by the Sisters:

The stick or the ruler would have been there on the teacher's desk so then if the Sister needed to administer it for whatever reason it was there at her hand.

10.44 The Sisters of Mercy acknowledged that corporal punishment was not confined to the classroom, but Sr Casey did not have any personal experience of what occurred in the Industrial School.

10.45 Other forms of punishment were resorted to in Newtownforbes. Such punishments included putting a child sitting alone at a 'punishment table' or putting her to the back of the classroom. Witnesses also made reference to children being placed in a small room on their own as a punishment. Sr Casey confirmed that a room known as St Rourke's did exist in Newtownforbes, although she was not able to identify which of two possible rooms it was. She confirmed that children were confined in this room as a punishment.

10.46 Speaking from her own experience in the primary school, Sr Casey said that punishable offences would have included being late for class, attempting to answer back or not knowing lessons. However, she said that she did not really know what was considered a serious enough offence to warrant being referred to the Resident Manager.

10.47 Sr Casey recalled seeing the industrial school children being slapped. She stated:

One Sister slapped children from the industrial school on the knuckles. This seemed wrong to me then and as I look back now, even more so. I recall another Sister who slapped too much and for what seemed little reason.

10.48 During the hearing, she elaborated further by saying:

The punishment at times took a level that I would have deemed to be unacceptable and I just wish to repeat what we have already said as Sisters of Mercy, that we really deeply regret and apologise for any hurt and damage that was caused to the children that passed through our schools.

10.49 Sr Casey also acknowledged that bed-wetting was a problem and children were slapped for bed-wetting. She emphasised, however, that it was only the older girls who were slapped, and that children under eight years of age were not punished for wetting the bed.

10.50 She said that there was very little understanding about the whole problem of bed-wetting, its causes and the shame associated with it. One of the other solutions used at that time was to deprive the children of a drink after a certain hour in the evening.

10.51 She was questioned about the rationale for slapping, and the policy of withholding fluids in the evening, as neither approach appeared to have had an effect on resolving the problem. She could not shed any light on whether these practices were even questioned.

10.52 Sr Casey had spoken to Sisters about whether head-shaving was used as a punishment. She said:

I spoke to Sisters about that and the majority wouldn't have remembered shaving of hairs being used as a punishment. In the course of conversation though with one she felt that it may have been used but nobody could tell me for certain that it was used. They could say that shaving of the hair was not uncommon when children became infested with lice, or whatever. But the Sisters would have offered me the view that it wasn't used as a punishment.

Documented instances of punishments

10.53 No punishment book was kept in Newtownforbes at any time during its history, and this fact was confirmed by Sr Casey. In addition, there were no letters or documents dealing with instances of physical punishment discovered to the Investigation Committee. However, the Department of Education discovery indicated that the Department Inspector was concerned that the children were being mistreated in the early 1940s.

10.54 Dr Anna McCabe⁴ visited the School in 1940 and had noticed in the infirmary that there was bruising on many of the girls' bodies. In her letter of 12th February 1940 to the Reverend Mother of the School, Sr Lucia, she stated:

I was not satisfied in finding so many of the girls in the Infirmary suffering from bruises on their bodies.

I wish particularly to draw attention to the latter as under no circumstances can the Department tolerate treatment of this nature and you being responsible for the care of these children will have some difficulty in avoiding censure.

10.55 The discovery contained no response to this letter, suggesting no reply was written by the Reverend Mother. The Sisters of Mercy contended that the letter of 12th February 1940 from Dr McCabe had not in fact been sent, as no such letter was found in their archive. The Congregation also said that it had been unaware of these allegations of neglect until these documents were furnished to it by the Commission as part of the discovery process in 2004. It acknowledged, once it had seen these documents, that it was '*deeply disturbed*' and it accepted the negative reports of the Department.

10.56 The Sisters of Mercy submitted annual reports to the Department of Education on the School's activities spanning the period 1938 to 1958. These reports do not reflect the views expressed by the Inspector in February 1940 which raised the issue of bruising on the bodies of girls in the infirmary. In these reports, the Sisters were eager to satisfy the Department that the most cordial and friendly of relations existed between staff and pupils. The 1941 report stated 'Nothing but the most cordial and friendly relations exist'. In 1948, it was noted that 'A very happy homely spirit prevails between nuns and pupils'.

10.57 In some years, the annual reports refer to punishments, including the 'Deprivation of Treats', which was considered 'seldom necessary', or being placed at a separate table in the dining hall, or being given a 'small charge instead of Recreation, or, Transcribing some papers of Literature'. The 1944 report noted that:

⁴ Dr Anna McCabe was the Department of Education Inspector for most of the relevant period.

the greatest punishment of all is to be brought under the notice of the Superior, on her making visits to the school, their faults made known to her. And thus their good name gone.

- 10.58** In 1947, the report noted that ‘Junior Children receive a “Motherly slap” on their arm’. The 1948 report commented that ‘junior children receive a light slap or a caution’ or they could be ‘Brought before Superior and their good name gone’.
- 10.59** These reports indicate that the Sisters of Mercy were aware of proper standards of punishment. The wording of these reports is very similar and repetitive so their value is questionable.

Evidence of respondents

- 10.60** A respondent witness, Sr Francesca, who worked in the Industrial School for nearly 20 years, gave evidence. The picture that emerged was that the large numbers in the School meant that discipline and control were important issues in the management of the School:

Well, you had to be formal with them and strict. You had to be, not harsh with them, no, but I'd say formal with them.

- 10.61** She added that another way of being formal was to impose a rule of silence at night in the dormitories. She said slapping was always a last resort and that she would avoid slapping the children if she could. Treats were used as an enticement for the children to behave. When children had to be slapped, she conceded that she did slap them with a stick or a cane or a ruler on the hands. She also acknowledged that they would be placed in a small room, for a period of half an hour to an hour as punishment. One such room was known as St Rourke's.

- 10.62** She said some children went through the School and were never slapped, and she disputed allegations that beatings were constant:

... if you take a 100 children, invariably somebody is going to be punished, but I wouldn't say it was constant beating.

- 10.63** Sr Francesca attributed much of the blame to the Department and the medical profession, for not providing the nuns with better advice on how to deal with the problem of bed-wetting.

- 10.64** She added:

... in hindsight and from experience I really feel that slapping children was not the solution or the answer, and I am sorry I ever did it. I don't think I would do it now or I wouldn't do it now.

- 10.65** The other respondent witness, Sr Elena, said that corporal punishment was necessary at times. Corporal punishment was also a deterrent against bad behaviour: with the threat of punishment, the pupils were more likely to co-operate and behave in class. She admitted that she used corporal punishment in the class by slapping with a cane or ruler. She claimed that she was strict but fair, and worked in the best interests of furthering the education of the children. To this end, she agreed that discipline and corporal punishment were part of the regime and necessary. In evidence, she stated:

... They appreciated discipline in the class very, very much and they worked very favourably with me and we got on. There was a good rapport between us, even though I was strict, but they knew I worked for their good and that was my one aim, to help every child as possibly best I could.

10.66 However, she disputed that corporal punishment was something that was used on a daily basis. She said she had noticed a cane one day:

and I said I will bring in this today, and if they see it in my hand it might keep them a bit quiet, they will sit down. They will know that I am on high today.

10.67 Further, she acknowledged that she treated the industrial school children differently:

I know you would have to be strict, very strict with them because learning and school and books wasn't their forte.

10.68 Sr Elena also admitted that she was exacting in her standards in the classroom, particularly with regard to homework, and if children did not have their homework done she would give them 'a *smack now and again*'. She acknowledged that she was more exacting with the children from the Industrial School.

10.69 This evidence confirmed Sr Casey's impression from her own recollection of national school that industrial school children were treated more harshly.

Witness statements

10.70 Thirteen witness statements were furnished to the Investigation Committee on behalf of the Sisters of Mercy. These 13 statements were from nuns who had taught in the primary school. Each of them stated that corporal punishment was used in the School but it was not 'in any way constant or excessive'. All of their statements repeated the words:

corporal punishment was used only as correction for misbehaviour. It was not administered for trivial reasons or for no reason at all.

10.71 Four of the 13 Sisters who submitted witness statements were in Newtownforbes serving as postulants in the early 1940s, the time when Dr Anna McCabe was highly critical of the Institution. Yet, each of these nuns claimed that the children were well cared for. It is impossible to reconcile these Sisters' memories of Newtownforbes with the documented material. The repetition of the words 'corporal punishment was used only as correction for misbehaviour' was formulaic and defensive and tended to undermine the independence of the statements.

Allegations of physical abuse

10.72 The witnesses who appeared before the Committee complained of severe physical abuse, including beatings. They claimed that such beatings were administered for bed-wetting, not knowing schoolwork, talking, and other behaviours.

Bed-wetting

10.73 One witness, Sarah,⁵ resident in Newtownforbes in the late 1940s to the early 1950s, vividly recalled being hit by a nun around the head for wetting the bed. She said that anyone who wet the bed was punished by a beating with a stick or a slap around the head. The punishment was administered there and then. They were told that they were 'stupid' or were called '*an amadán*' or '*an eejit*', anything to make them feel '*degraded*'.

10.74 One witness, Hannah,⁶ resident in Newtownforbes from the mid-1940s to the mid-1950s, also recalled getting '*unmerciful beatings for wetting the bed*'. The residents would have to display their wet sheets to the nuns and then they would be beaten.

⁵ This is a pseudonym.

⁶ This is a pseudonym.

Not knowing schoolwork

- 10.75 Sarah recalled being beaten with the side of a ruler on her knuckles for attempting to write with her left hand:

I went to pick up a pencil with my left hand and I got the ruler, not the flat of the ruler, the side of the ruler on the back of the hand, on the knuckles to make sure that, you know, you didn't do that again.

- 10.76 Another witness, Rachel,⁷ resident in Newtownforbes from the late 1930s to the late 1940s, also alleged that she was beaten for not learning passages from the Bible in school. On this occasion, the nun who was teaching her, Sr Carla⁸, kept her back after class and swung her around by the hair until she had lumps in her hair. As a result of being kept behind after class, this witness was late for her dinner and so she was hit on her back with a cane by the nun in charge of the dining hall, Sr Paola⁹.

- 10.77 Hannah recalled that she was beaten for not knowing her lessons, or not getting them right in school, or not being able to read. She alleged that a cane or a strap was used to beat them with. She alleged that they were beaten on the hands with the cane, a ruler or the leather strap.

Miscellaneous punishments

- 10.78 Rachel recalled being beaten with a belt by a nun, Sr Paola, as she and two other girls had fallen asleep in the same bed together. The next morning, they got another beating with a cane by a different nun, Sr Francesca. They were then aged about 10 or 11 years. This witness also took issue with the documents from the Sisters of Mercy stating that the children received a 'light slap'. She said they got a beating and not a light slap.

Conclusions on physical abuse

- 10.79
1. **In the absence of documentary evidence, it is not possible to reach conclusions as to whether the corporal punishment used in Newtownforbes was so excessive or pervasive as to amount to abuse. Documentation would have provided contemporary evidence about the extent to which corporal punishment was used, and the policy of the authorities as to its use. Without it, the evidence presents two conflicting accounts. Ex-residents who gave evidence indicated that it was widespread and severe, and was administered for trivial offences, not just serious breaches of discipline. The Sisters of Mercy, on the other hand, did not dispute that corporal punishment was a feature of life in the School, and that children were slapped with a cane, a ruler or a leather strap, however they believed it was not excessive or abusive, but appropriate for the time.**
 2. **Older children were physically punished for bed-wetting. Ignorance was no excuse for the mismanagement of nocturnal enuresis in this way. Whilst blame must attach to the Department of Education's Medical Inspector for failing to address the issue, the Sisters should have informed themselves of current thinking about how to deal with the problem.**
 3. **Other forms of punishment besides corporal punishment could be abusive when they caused humiliation, rejection or fear.**
 4. **The letter of Dr McCabe in February 1940 referring to bruising on children's bodies is disturbing. Sisters who were in Newtownforbes at the time gave evidence that the children were well cared for. None of them appeared to have been aware that children had been mistreated in the School.**

⁷ This is a pseudonym.

⁸ This is a pseudonym.

⁹ This is a pseudonym.

5. In the national school, the Industrial School children were treated more harshly than the town children. One of the Sisters who taught in the School claimed that she had to be more severe on these children and appeared to defend this severity as being necessary.
6. Despite the Department's regulations forbidding the use of corporal punishment for failure at lessons, it was used for that purpose.

Neglect

Documented evidence about living conditions in the School

Living conditions in the 1940s

- 10.80** The picture of the School that emerges from the Department's records is one of serious neglect in the early years under review. A letter dated 12th February 1940 to the Resident Manager of the School from the Department's Medical Inspector, Dr Anna McCabe, reveals the appalling neglect of the children. In this letter, Dr McCabe expressed her disappointment at the 'lack of supervision' in the School and, more importantly, her dismay at the filthy dirty condition of the children:

I cannot find any excuse which would exonerate you and your staff from the verminous condition of several of the children's heads.

- 10.81** Dr McCabe was highly critical 'in finding so many of the girls in the Infirmary suffering from bruises on their bodies', stating, 'under no circumstances can the Department tolerate treatment of this nature and you being responsible for the care of these children will have some difficulty in avoiding censure'.

- 10.82** Further neglect was noted in this letter by the 'untreated abscess I discovered in the child in the Infirmary'. She attributed the cause of the serious neglected state of the children to the lack of adequate and appropriate supervision by the nuns. She prevailed upon the Resident Manager to take immediate action to remedy these problems, particularly by increasing staff numbers to ensure stricter supervision. No further action was taken by Dr McCabe except for the threat of taking the 'matter further' if the situation did not improve by her next visit.

- 10.83** It is strange that conditions had deteriorated so rapidly in just 10 months because, in April 1939, when Dr McCabe had visited the School, she found it to be in 'a clean healthy state' and the food, she noted, 'was of very good quality'.

- 10.84** The inspection reports for 1941 and 1942 are missing. The next available General Inspection report of Dr McCabe is that of 30th September 1943. On that occasion, she found that the School had 'much improved since previous inspections'. Her only criticism was the fact that many of the children had no shoes and were going around barefoot. She found that 12 small babies 'had no shoes at all' and noted that they 'looked forlorn and cold'. She was of the view, however, that the medical care and supervision of the children had improved. Following on from this visit, the Department of Education Chief Inspector wrote to the Resident Manager on 13th October 1943 regarding the lack of shoes for the younger children. He requested the Resident Manager to take 'immediate steps to remedy this matter' and pointed out in the letter that the practice of allowing children to go barefoot was condemned 'on medical grounds as exposing the children to the danger of infection from cuts'.

- 10.85** By 1944, conditions had deteriorated yet again in the School. When Dr McCabe visited the School on 15th June 1944 she wrote, 'I regret to state that this school has gone back since my last inspection'.

- 10.86** In particular, the cleanliness and hygiene of the children was a great cause of concern again:
The children looked and were very untidy, necks and hair badly washed and in most cases heads were verminous.
- 10.87** On this visit, she also found that 13 children had lost weight but this, it seemed, was attributed to their having home visits or having returned from hospital. She prevailed upon the Resident Manager to make a number of improvements, particularly with regard to the supervision of the children. From this report it seemed that the supervision was left to the girls themselves instead of members of the religious community.
- 10.88** Dr McCabe made a number of recommendations for improving the standard of cleanliness and hygiene in the School. She recommended providing additional bathrooms, a toothbrush for every child, and a nailbrush and more mirrors. She had also complained about the lack of adequate fire exits in one of the dormitories. One particular dormitory only had one fire exit instead of two, the number the Department felt was necessary 'so as to obviate, as far as possible, the danger of the loss of life through fire'.
- 10.89** When Dr McCabe visited the School the following year, on 3rd July 1945, she found that there was 'much improvement generally'. In particular, she was of the view that the children were 'clean and well cared' and there was 'better supervision all round'.
- 10.90** On her next visit on 1st May 1946, Dr McCabe had similar comments to make, noting that the 'children were much cleaner and tidier' and the supervision was much better. Again, in 1947, Dr McCabe made the same comments, particularly that the children were cleaner and neater, and the supervision was better. In 1948, it was noted that extra staff were given over to the Industrial School.
- 10.91** In contrast with Dr McCabe's report in 1948, where she recorded that the School had improved and the children were 'well cared and supervised', there is a contemporaneous complaint from a parent of children at the School. A father had visited and had found that his girls were 'suffering from scabies for months past'. He made a complaint to the Department of Education in person on 24th April 1948. He said that 'One of the girls hands is practically disabled from the sores between her fingers'.
- 10.92** He also complained about the 'very bad condition' of the children's footwear and the fact they had no stockings. The Departmental note which recorded this complaint stated that the parent in question was asked to put his complaint in writing. It is not known whether he ever did so, but it would appear that he did not. The note ended 'nothing further in this case'.

Living conditions in the 1950s

- 10.93** Conditions seemed to have improved considerably in the 1950s, and they never reverted to the neglect of the 1940s. This improvement was in spite of a significant fall-off in numbers, which must have had a serious impact on the finances of the School.
- 10.94** Declining numbers were a constant source of worry. The only issue raised by the Resident Manager with the Departmental Inspector was the decline in the number of admissions to the School and the resulting reduction in income. In 1954, Dr McCabe's inspection report noted that the Resident Manager was 'very anxious about falling numbers'. On every subsequent visit by Dr McCabe, the Resident Manager spoke to her about this issue and, in 1956, suggested taking in small boys. Dr McCabe informed her that it would not be possible, as the junior schools were also experiencing a decline in numbers and that there were three other schools in the locality who could take in little boys. In 1957 and 1958, the General Inspection Report noted that the Resident

Manager was 'very perturbed about the falling numbers'. In 1959, Dr McCabe again commented that the Resident Manager was 'very upset that the numbers for admission are falling'.

- 10.95** Dr McCabe did not comment on the impact of the reduced numbers on the ability of the Sisters to deliver an appropriate standard of care to the children.

Living conditions in the 1960s

- 10.96** The issue of falling numbers continued to be a preoccupation of the Resident Manager throughout the 1960s. Each year from 1960 to 1964 the General Inspection Reports noted that the School was 'very well run'. Each category of inspection was noted as being 'very good', particularly food and diet, health, clothing and sanitation. Dr McCabe commented in 1964:

The Resident Manager is very co-operative and kind and anxious to make all the improvements she can.

- 10.97** The final Inspection Report for the School was dated 28th July 1966 and was conducted by Dr Lysaght. Overall, he found that the School was well run in each area of inspection.

Response of the Sisters of Mercy to the documents

- 10.98** The Sisters of Mercy were unaware of the contents of the Department of Education records in respect of Newtownforbes until they were furnished to them by the Committee as part of the discovery process in 2004. They said that, before their discovery, they were unaware of such dreadful conditions existing in the School in the 1940s. Sr Casey at the Phase I public hearing acknowledged that, once they had seen the documents, they had become very concerned:

We were deeply disturbed when we received the Department discovery of those documents between '40 and '45. I immediately set about meeting all who had worked at any stage in the orphanage to try and see could they help throw light on these documents, because that was the first time that we were aware, and that we had sight of those documents.

- 10.99** They asserted that their knowledge of conditions in the School was very limited as their Congregational archive did not reveal such neglect. The material consisted of medical records, school registers, education levels of the children, and very general information which did not in any way '*corroborate the complaints that had been made by the complainants*'. Apart from the lack of documentary material, their attempts to discover more about the School were hampered by the fact that many Sisters who had worked in the School had since died. In particular, all of the Resident Managers during the period under review were deceased. When the allegations of abuse came to light, it was a source of 'shock' to the Sisters of Mercy.

- 10.100** It was even more of a shock to the Sisters when the revelations were made in the 'Dear Daughter' programme shown on television in 1996 because:

... it did come as a shock to us at that time, particularly in view of the fact that up until then quite a few of the former residents would have been in the pattern of not only contacting different Sisters, but actually coming back and visiting the convent.

- 10.101** When questioned about the maltreatment of the children that appeared to have occurred, on the basis of these documents, Sr Casey accepted at the Phase III public hearing the negative reports of the Department and acknowledged:

That was a difficult period in the time of the Institution and we deeply regret that, but from then on, I think written into the record again from the opening appearance at the Commission ... most of the reports showed a marked improvement.

10.102 Sr Casey was unable to provide any explanation for the bad management in the 1940s. She offered the view that a change in Resident Manager in 1947 seemed to bring about an improvement and, from then on, supervision became a central issue, which led to improved conditions. She was informed by one Sister who worked in the School at that time that *'the supervision and all that became a big issue ... it was a huge issue, that you could never, you know, leave the children alone, that there would always have to be somebody there at meals or getting up or whatever'*.

10.103 One of the Sisters, Sr Francesca, who gave evidence commented on this issue. She stressed that the Resident Manager was very insistent that the children should be supervised at all times, but she was unaware of the reason for it. This would indicate that Dr McCabe's criticisms had been communicated to the management of Newtownforbes at the time, notwithstanding the lack of any documentary evidence of such communication. It was consistent with the hierarchical structure of the Sisters that the nuns working on the ground were not informed of the Departmental criticisms.

Food

10.104 Dr McCabe's first General Inspection report of 14th April 1939 was very positive about the food. She found it was 'of very good quality' and 'plentiful'. However, by 1944, the food had deteriorated to being 'fairly satisfactory'. In that year, she also noted that 13 children had lost weight, but this, it seemed, was attributed to their having been sick and having just returned from hospital. For the remainder of the 1940s, Dr McCabe consistently described the food as 'satisfactory' or 'good' in her reports, without providing any details.

10.105 Throughout the 1950s, the food was described by Dr McCabe as 'very good'. Her reports during these years are repetitive, as they consistently referred to the food as being 'well balanced' and 'attractively served'.

10.106 Again, in the 1960s, the food was described by her as 'very good'. The General Inspection Report of 1964 contained a sample menu drawn up by the Resident Manager, which illustrated the type of food provided for one particular day. According to this menu, the children received bread and butter and either porridge and fried bread or sausages and black pudding or eggs for breakfast. Dinner consisted of soup or milk, roast beef or boiled meat, potatoes and vegetables in season, and a milk pudding or fruit pie dessert. Lunch consisted of tea with bread and butter, meat sandwich or summer salad, and a fruit cake or pastries, and supper was milk or cocoa with bread, butter and jam, and black pudding occasionally. Special mention was made of delicate children receiving an egg flip at 11am and cod liver oil at 4.30pm. Dr Lysaght, who took over from Dr McCabe, also described the diet as 'well balanced and varied' in his 1966 report.

10.107 One of the nuns, Sr Francesca, who worked in the School from 1946 to 1963, gave evidence that the children received a hot breakfast in the winter time, which consisted of fried bread with either cocoa or tea and they also got porridge. In the evening, they received tea and bread and butter for their supper. She thought that the children received eggs twice a week as they had a farm with chickens and hens. She said that the children and the nuns received the food from the same source. She explained:

we got the milk from the farm and they got milk from the farm, we got the bread from the bakery and they got the bread from the bakery. Meat was ordered from the one butcher, we got it in the convent and they got it. From my knowledge of the Sister in charge of the food in the dining room, she was very exact that they would have good food.

10.108 She was of the view that they received enough food, but that:

children are always hungry, even in boarding schools, but, like, I can understand that they say that they were hungry, you know, but they got their regular meals and good meals.

- 10.109** She confirmed that children who were delicate or underweight were given an egg flip or cod liver oil in between meals by being taken out of school. Rachel also said, *'I used to actually have to leave my class and go up for an egg flip and cod liver oil at 10.00 o'clock'*.
- 10.110** Hannah, who was in the School between the mid-1940s and mid-1950s, recalled that she was constantly hungry during her time there: *'I know we were always hungry, terrible hunger, hunger pains'*.
- 10.111** She complained of being so hungry that they used to *'eat the grass'* which grew in the School grounds. However, she recollected that they received three meals a day: the breakfast consisted of porridge and bread and dripping; the dinner was a stew with potatoes; and supper was bread and jam. She added that she never remembered receiving an egg at all while she was in the School, but she conceded that it could have been the case that she disliked eggs and added, *'I know I was a very bad eater'*.

Clothing

- 10.112** One of the Sisters, Sr Francesca, who was responsible for the clothing of the children, and who worked in the Industrial School from 1946 to 1963, gave evidence that every Christmas she tried to have something new for the children to wear, as her own mother always had new clothes for her when she was growing up. She strove for individuality:

my ambition was to get them out of uniform. Now they all wouldn't be the same, there would be as many colours as the rainbow, and I was very proud of the fact that I was able to do something like that for them.

- 10.113** She wanted each child to have three sets of clothes: one for school, one for outside school, and one for good wear. By the time she left the School in 1963, each girl had three sets of sandals and shoes and three outfits of clothing. The Resident Manager got her the material to make the clothes, heavy material for winter and lightweight for summer. She also taught the girls how to make clothes and to knit:

They were very proud of the fact they were able to do it because I taught them how to use patterns, how to cut out clothes and how to use knitting patterns.

- 10.114** According to her, each girl had a locker assigned with a number which was for laundry purposes only. The clean clothes were put into the lockers once a week and, on laundry day, the girls changed and brought the soiled clothes down into a hamper that went to the laundry. Each item had a number to avoid getting mixed up and, when the clothes were brought down to the hamper, the girls showed the numbers. She stressed, however, that the underwear was not examined, as alleged.
- 10.115** She said that she had no recollection of children being without shoes. She was not able to provide any information as to the state of the children's clothes in the early 1940s.
- 10.116** Sr Elena, who taught in the primary school, stated the children from the Industrial School were *'always scrupulously clean and very well groomed'*, and she never saw any of them *'with broken shoes, strapless shoes or whatever could be wrong with them'*. She was also of the view that their clothing was no different to the clothing worn by the day pupils from the town.

- 10.117 Sarah, who entered the School in the mid-1940s when she was aged one and a half years, and stayed until the early 1950s, when she was eight years approximately, recalled being constantly cold at night time in bed.
- 10.118 Rachel described the clothes and the undergarments as *'big like denim jeans'* which were only changed once a month and *'it was too bad if you had an accident'*. However, she said the bed linen was *'very clean'* and the beds were cleaned and dusted every Saturday morning. She acknowledged that they had a toothbrush each, but shared the same bath water when having a bath.
- 10.119 Witnesses said that children were not told about menstruation. Another distressing aspect for the witnesses as children was the complete lack of information provided on the facts of life and their total ignorance concerning this subject. Two witnesses stated that there were no sanitary towels provided.

Conclusion

- 10.120 • **Food and clothing improved over the years. In particular, Sr Francesca made considerable efforts to clothe the children properly. Problems with these basic elements of care that emerged in the 1940s appear to have been caused by a lack of proper supervision on the part of the Sisters. As there were almost no lay staff employed, it must be concluded that the Institution was run largely by the older girls. Once supervision was improved, the standard of care improved.**

Education

- 10.121 In 1942, the internal primary school at Newtownforbes merged with the town national school, which was situated on the same grounds as the Industrial School, and from then on the industrial school pupils attended the same school as children from the town. This change was in accordance with one of the recommendations of the Cussen Report in 1936. Literary instruction for juniors (children under 14 years) was to be not less than four and a half hours daily, and for seniors not less than three hours.
- 10.122 Children over 14 years followed the Domestic Economy Course for industrial school training in subjects including needlework, laundry, housewifery, dressmaking and cookery. The Children Act, 1941, provided for an extension of the period of detention of industrial school children to enable them to attend second level education. Sr Casey at the Phase I public hearing stated that the records of the Sisters of Mercy showed that, in 1950, three pupils got such extensions. She added that, in 1950 or 1951:
- there is a reference in our archives to seven attending secondary school, five getting honours in Caffrey's exam, I think that was a business examination or book keeping or something of that nature.*
- 10.123 The school register, she said, also showed that, between 1952 and 1962, at least eight children were attending the secondary school. She drew on her own experience as a pupil and recollected that, in the 1960s, there were *'at least 12 to 16 from the industrial school'* attending the secondary school, but they did not actually proceed to Leaving Certificate class, and she only remembered one going as far as fourth year. However, she pointed out that this was at a time before the introduction of free education, which came about in 1967, and most children left school at 14 years of age. In her own class, 30 sat the Intermediate Certificate, but only 13 went on to do the Leaving Certificate.
- 10.124 She was of the view that children who showed an academic interest were encouraged by the nuns to remain on in secondary education.

10.125 One of the biggest grievances of the complainant witnesses was the lack of education and career opportunities available to them: the industrial school children were prepared for domestic service rather than any other career. Sr Casey at the Phase III public hearing conceded this point, but sought to put it in the context of the time:

Certainly the training was for domestic service, but if one puts that in the context, that at the time and the years that we are talking about domestic service would have been what most of the people in the country would have went into. Because if you even look at the Central Statistics Office, figures from there would have indicated that, for example, of people gainfully occupied by occupation in 1946 that in personal service there were 102,000. 83% were women and of that 79,000 of them were employed as domestic servants, so it wasn't unusual in the wider context.

10.126 She also pointed out that some of the girls from the Industrial School went into nursing and into retail. She acknowledged that not all the children from the Industrial School sat for the Primary Certificate, but added that 'every effort was made to give the children a basic primary education'.

Evidence of respondents on education

10.127 Sr Elena, who worked in the primary school, taught fifth and sixth classes combined, amounting to approximately 35 children. She commented on the difference between the industrial school children and the town children. She noted that the industrial school children lacked the advantage of coming from a home with all its attendant love and care and affection, and said that they were, 'slower and more indifferent and hadn't their heart in it all. They just came to school because they had to go to school'.

10.128 Furthermore, she felt that they had no ambition, whereas the day pupils from the town were very anxious to 'get on' and were progressive, and some of the industrial school children were very weak. She made extra efforts to help them but, with some children who were very bright and some who were weak in the same class, it made teaching difficult. She was sympathetic:

I always thought, you see, they hadn't the advantages of coming from a home. They were in the same environment all the time, surrounded by the same four walls, and I kept that before me to try and have them as good as the others, as possibly as good as the others.

10.129 She did not believe in ostracising weaker children and never kept children at the back of the class, or considered them dunces, as alleged by some of the complainants:

I never did it because I didn't believe in it. I didn't believe in ostracising some children and saying they were dunces or branding them. I never did it, and that is why, you see, I was rather strict, maybe, and perhaps, I would say, harsh with them to try and bring them on and make them realise that they were as good as the next and that they could do it if they made an effort. That was always at the back of my mind.

10.130 Sr Elena disputed the contention made by some complainants that they learnt nothing while in school, and said that she 'always insisted that they be able to read, write and spell and stand up for themselves'. She insisted:

that was my motto, with taking an interest in them and working with them and perhaps pushing them and driving them, a lot of them they didn't want to do it. That's what I aimed at all the time. Any industrial school children, I don't like using that word, but anyway – any of these children that I had in my class, they were treated the very same as every other child and I insisted that they did their homework and I took it and corrected it and showed them their mistakes. There was no exceptions made, and I would be harder on them, I suppose, than on the others because they had less sense. Some of them had no interest in themselves, whether they got on or whether they didn't, but then as they would get older, they'd say, "I wasn't taught" or "I wasn't helped" or whatever the case may be.

10.131 Sr Elena said that she had no input into where the children went afterwards. She acknowledged that many of them went into domestic service. Her duty was to teach and she was confined to that, she had no say in anything else:

You know, we just taught them and prepared them, and then outside of school there was two other Sisters with them who taught them husbandry and cleaning and all that to prepare them; exactly.

10.132 She could not discuss such matters with anyone in authority, not even the headmistress of the primary school, because *‘the headmistress had no interest in the Industrial School’*.

10.133 When questioned further, she clarified that the headmistress was only interested in the day pupils and not the industrial school pupils. She did not approve of this attitude, but felt that she was in no position to challenge it, as she was a much more junior Sister and had no say:

It wasn't right. To me more time should be given with the children in the Industrial School than those coming from their homes because of the disadvantages that the industrial school children were under and what they were deprived of, of a home and parents and love and care, and all the rest of it.

10.134 Sr Elena said she was very much aware of the needs of the industrial school children, but claimed she was helpless to do anything because of the hierarchical system. Each of the Congregational witnesses acknowledged that the needs of the industrial school children were not met, although they differed on the reasons why. At Newtownforbes, the recommendation of the Cussen Commission to integrate industrial school children was implemented but the evidence of the complainants was that they were very aware at that time that the system discriminated against them.

Evidence of complainants on education

10.135 Hannah, who was there from early 1940s to the mid-1950s, stated that she *‘didn't get much schooling’*, adding that she *‘was a very slow child’*. Her lack of schooling resulted in her not being able to read and write to the present day. She explained her illiteracy as follows:

I wasn't taught to read and write because, as I said, perhaps I was a slow child and I didn't get that care like the other children did. The other children got more care than me, I do not know why. Is it because I was abandoned or I didn't have anybody, I do not know? My education was non-existent.

10.136 When she left the School, she got a job as a domestic in England working for a lady who looked after her like a daughter and with whom she spent 10 years.

10.137 Her lack of education, she said, had ruined her life:

I can't say I can't get on with my life, but I could have been anything. I want to be somebody but I can't. Even the college I go to now, I get great support from them, not from the Irish Government. I don't get any help at all. It has just blighted my life.

10.138 She added:

I just want to know why, why I wasn't educated and why I wasn't looked after as a normal human being, you know.

10.139 She explained further:

I was going to go on for nursing but the education stopped me, the reading and writing. The barrier was – I couldn't cope at all with it. I was failing all the exams and it just was dreadful. And that was something I wanted to do in life and I didn't get the opportunity.

10.140 Sarah, the witness who was beaten with a ruler for using her left hand, said that as a result of this treatment and her consequent fear, she was unable to learn anything in school and was put sitting at the back of the class:

Because I was left handed and I really couldn't learn nothing, I was just living in fear in that place, you know. That is all I remember about school, sitting in the back of the class, not with all the other children in the front.

10.141 She said that, when she was taken out of the School at the age of eight years and returned to her mother, she attended the National School on Baggot Street, where she was put into a baby class where *'children were playing with sand'*.

10.142 A different attitude was expressed by another witness, Rachel, who had no complaints about the quality of the education and who obtained the Primary Certificate. In fact, she said she *'loved school because it was an escape from work'*.

Chores

Evidence of the Sisters of Mercy

10.143 At Phase I, Sr Casey acknowledged that the children were engaged in *'significant amounts of domestic work, as well as other work in the laundry, in the farm, in the bakery, depending on their age'*. She acknowledged the effect that this would have had on them:

So this undoubtedly would have impacted on the children. In fact, the children could easily have felt that their lives were thwarted and stunted by this type of regime.

10.144 The chores which the children were required to do were, according to the Sisters of Mercy, *'perceived as being part of their industrial training'*. The main complaint of the witnesses was the vast amount of physical work that they had to do. The argument put forward by the Sisters of Mercy was that such work formed part of the Domestic Economy Course, which each girl from 14 years of age was required to undertake. The course included subjects such as needlework, cookery, laundry, housewifery and dressmaking. The Reports of School Activities which cover the years 1938 to 1958, which were submitted to the Department of Education annually by the Resident Manager, make reference to these subjects. The 1948 report said:

These girls take their turns in assisting in their own school kitchen and dining hall, prepare trays up for their friends. Assist under the direct supervision of a nun in the bathing and toilet of young children. Also in sweeping, dusting of convent parlour and halls, washing tiles, answering hall doors to prepare them for their future employment.

10.145 From the age of 14 years onwards, Sr Casey said the girls worked in different areas of the School, including the farm, the laundry and the bakery. She recalled hearing the girls singing while they were scrubbing the cloisters. However, the evidence given was that the girls were carrying out this type of work long before they were 14 years of age. The Sisters of Mercy stated that *'children of all ages carried out domestic chores according to what was considered suitable to their age'*.

Evidence of complainants

10.146 Many of the witnesses complained of the hard physical work known as chores which they had to do in the School as children.

10.147 Rachel recounted that they *'had to work very, very hard'*. She gave evidence of the type of work that was part of the daily routine of the Industrial School. From the age of seven or eight years, she said she was on her knees scrubbing and polishing floors, cloisters and big dormitories. When she was 10 or 11 years, her main chore was looking after the babies, which entailed getting up at 6 o'clock in the morning to wash and dress them and to wash their sheets if they had been

soiled, as there were no nappies. She had to look after approximately nine or 10 babies in one dormitory. She slept in the dormitory with them.

10.148 Rachel said that there were three girls looking after the babies and toddlers, one for each of the three dormitories. In the mornings, she had to wash and dress the babies, and give them their breakfast of porridge, all before she went to school. No adult, lay staff or nun slept in the dormitory with the babies. When she went to school, two nuns, one of whom was very old, would look after the babies. Once school was finished for the day, she had to go back to look after these young children and take them out to the yard to play. At 5 o'clock, she had to get the children washed and ready for bed before she had her own tea. From 7 to 9 o'clock in the evening, the witness described that she had her study time and then, at 9 o'clock, she went back to the children. At midnight, a nun rang the bell and she got the babies up to put them on their potties. The routine was the same at weekends. Rachel commented that a doctor had told her that she was a mother before she was a child, *'I find I am living my childhood through my little three year old granddaughter'*.

10.149 This witness's favourable comment about the education that she received, because it was *'an escape from work'*, becomes understandable when seen against the background of chores she had to do.

10.150 Hannah gave detailed evidence of the daily routine, involving the various chores which she was required to do. From the age of 11 or 12 years, her job was to make the bread in the bakery, early in the morning before going to school:

A particular day, would be you would be up fairly early and you would have to get up to make the bread in the bakery. We were quite young at that time, I am not quite sure of the age but we used to have to make bread at quite an early age. Some of the girls were quite small. They had to stand on stools to go in to make the bread, like troughs, to make the bread.

10.151 After working in the bakery in the morning, they then went and had their breakfast before attending school. Other chores included washing and scrubbing the floors in the dormitories, staircases and in the convent. Even during holiday times, there was work to be done. She recalled that they had to tease mattresses during the holidays. This witness also worked in the laundry from the age of 14 or 15 years. Contrary to what the nuns asserted, that the girls were happy whilst doing this type of work and were singing, she said *'We were always quiet and the nun would be saying the rosary around you or whatever, especially in the laundry'*.

10.152 Hannah described the chores they had to carry out as *'hard labour'*. She alleged that they had to wash the nuns' clothes and do the ironing.

Conclusions on neglect

- 10.153**
- 1. The care of the children was seriously neglected in the early 1940s. In particular, the health and hygiene of the children suffered.**
 - 2. The children received a basic primary education, but their career opportunities were predominantly limited to domestic service.**
 - 3. The Industrial School children were treated more harshly in school than pupils from the town, and this impacted on their ability to thrive educationally.**
 - 4. Children from a very young age were required to undertake heavy physical chores which exceeded their capabilities.**
 - 5. Children over 14 years were required to carry out heavy physical labour under the guise of industrial training.**

6. Children were required to provide care for infants, without adult support or supervision from a young age.

Emotional abuse

10.154 The Sisters of Mercy, in their Opening Statement, conceded that ‘the individual needs of each child could not be addressed; that each child’s potential could not be known or realised’. They acknowledged:

It is undoubtedly the case that the children being placed in industrial schools were a particularly vulnerable population, not merely because they were children, but also because, in many cases, of the deprived circumstances from which they were coming. We recognise that there was no identification or understanding of many of the special or particular needs these children must have had, and that this lack of understanding showed itself in many aspects of the running of the schools.

10.155 Sr Casey at Phase I referred to the limitations of the system which, she said, did not and could not give individual attention to the children. She pointed out that the School catered for large numbers of children and there was only a handful of nuns to take care of them. She said that they had no childcare experience.

10.156 The system was that two nuns worked full-time in the School, with others stepping in for supervision purposes. These nuns worked long hours, seven days a week, which in itself put pressure on them and ‘*would have had a huge impact on the children that were resident at the time*’. She said that the ‘*complaints made by former residents brought home to us in a very vivid manner the experience of the children, and how this kind of a system just couldn’t meet the needs of children*’.

10.157 Sr Francesca noted that the children in Newtownforbes did not get many visits from their families. It was rare that a child would get a visit. They did not get letters from their families on a regular basis, and some of the children did not hear from them at all. She said that, when she was working in the School, she was not aware of this need to belong to a family. She only realised with hindsight the yearning the children had to belong to a family:

in hindsight again, we tried to give them everything, we’ll say, materially, spiritually, physically, but we couldn’t give them what they were longing for and that was family.

10.158 Sr Elena commented on the longing for a family and the effect of the break-up of the family unit on the children. The industrial school children ‘*longed for affection*’:

Well, I remember school time, 3:15 or whatever, when we’d close the school, they’d hold on to you and hold your hands and come along with you. To me, that was they were yearning for affection.

10.159 She also noticed that:

I saw all these children confined, you know, to a very small area and they looked forlorn, many of them.

10.160 She added, ‘*nobody seemed to claim them*’.

Evidence of complainants

Loss of family

10.161 Rachel referred to the break-up of the family and the fact that, although the family home was in Dublin, she and her sister were sent to Newtownforbes:

I was taken away at three years of age ... My sister was eight and I was three years of age ... I want to know why we were sent, myself and my sister were sent 80 miles away where we had contact with nobody, no family, no nothing. So with the result I lost out on a family.

10.162 She had contact with her older sister in Newtownforbes and said that she seemed to bear the brunt of the regime on her behalf. There was no preparation for leaving the School when her time came at age 16. She remembered that she was not even informed that she was going home. A dress and a coat were made for her, and a lay person who worked in the School brought her to the train station, where she was met by two boys who delivered her to her parents.

Death of a child

10.163 The death of a child that Rachel used to look after had a very traumatic and distressing effect on her. One morning, the child was not well and she knew there was something wrong with her:

because she was just lying around and I took her on my lap and I hugged her and tried to comfort the child, although I was only a child myself. I sent up word to say that the child wasn't well, but nobody came down.

10.164 She heard that the child had died when she returned from school:

So when the school was over that day we heard that she was after dying, and I still see her on the bed with her little long dress laid out and we all queued up to see her. That lasted with me for my life, I always wondered where the child was buried.

10.165 The death of this young child was very distressing for her, particularly because of the lack of information provided and the fact that she believed no funeral took place:

It haunted me all my life wondering where that child was buried because there was no funeral.

10.166 Another source of distress was that she was never told the cause of the child's death. Records of the Sisters of Mercy noted that the child died of cardiac disease. Another note recorded the name of the child, and the fact that a nun and a senior girl were with her when she died. The Sisters of Mercy at the hearing of this witness apologised for this traumatic event in her life. They said:

The Sisters of Mercy would like to apologise to you for the trauma you must have suffered from witnessing her in that state of ill health.

10.167 They gave an undertaking to the witness to inform her of the location of the grave subsequently.

General conclusions

- 10.168**
- 1. Prior to 1954, numbers were adequate to ensure that Newtownforbes was financially viable. However, the Department of Education Inspector in the 1940s was very critical of the health and living conditions of the children in the School. It is clear that children during this period suffered serious neglect.**
 - 2. Complainants spoke of poor food and clothing in the period after 1954, although there is no evidence that the children were malnourished or starved. Without a large farm**

or a profitable industry to supplement the capitation grant, the management would have had to struggle economically, resulting in the poor provision of basic needs.

3. The day-to-day care of the children was undertaken by just two or three Sisters. Management ought to have recognised the inevitable consequence of such a system. It was abusive for the Sisters, who had a heavy burden of responsibility and work placed on them, and on the children, who could not have received adequate care and attention.
4. In order to control such large numbers of children, the Sisters resorted to a strict regime, depending to a large extent on corporal punishment. It became extensive, and used for minor misdemeanours, and even though it may not have been abusive in terms of severity, it did result in control through fear.
5. Transferring the Industrial School children to an external national school to be educated alongside children from the local community should have been a positive development, but real integration did not happen. Teachers treated them more harshly and the headmistress *'had no interest'* in the Industrial School children. They felt different, isolated and inferior as a result.
6. Instead of getting more encouragement to learn, the Industrial School children experienced a more punitive regime, and therefore became more disadvantaged. A Sister who taught in the national school admitted that she used more corporal punishment on the Industrial School children because they *'had less sense'*. She described them as *'slower and more indifferent and hadn't their heart in it at all'*. Such children needed encouragement and not a punitive, oppressive regime.
7. Heavy physical duties were required of children from a very young age. These chores were unsuitable because of the physical demands they made and the responsibilities placed on young shoulders. Children were required to do onerous chores before going to school, which affected their ability to learn.
8. Residents were required to provide care for infants without adult support or supervision. This was an unreasonable burden of responsibility, inappropriate to their age and was neglectful of the residents and of the infants.