

Chapter 13

St Patrick's Industrial School, Kilkenny, 1879–1966

Introduction

- 13.01** In 1879, the Bishop of Ossory, Dr Moran, acquired from the State an agricultural college known as 'model farm', for the purpose of establishing an industrial school for the boys of the diocese. It was situated just over a mile outside Kilkenny city, and consisted of a large house with outbuildings on about 80 acres of land. He invited the Sisters of Charity to take over the management and control of the model farm and convert it into an industrial school.
- 13.02** On 23rd December 1879, St Patrick's was certified as an industrial school for the admission of 186 boys up to the age of 10 years.
- 13.03** St Patrick's Industrial School closed on 25th November 1966. All the boys resident in the School at the time were transferred to other institutions. Later that year, with the approval of the Department of Health, St Patrick's reopened as a school for children with severe or minor learning difficulties. It still provides residential care, day care, respite care and a special school for those with learning disabilities.

The children

- 13.04** During the period under investigation, 1933 to 1966, 1,282 boys passed through St Patrick's. Of those, 1,176 were committed by the courts and 106 by other means. When the boys reached the age of 10, they were transferred to other industrial schools, usually at the end of a quarter. In March 1965, at the suggestion of the Resident Manager in a letter to the Department of Education, a new policy was adopted whereby the boys remained in St Patrick's until the end of the school year.

Sisters and staff working in the Industrial School

- 13.05** The Sister who was appointed as the local Superior in St Patrick's generally also acted as Resident Manager of the Industrial School.
- 13.06** The Sisters in the Community worked in various capacities in St Patrick's, ranging from teachers and carers to working in the kitchen and laundry. In general, the number of Sisters in the Community was between 12 and 14, although it is not clear how many of them were actively engaged in the work of the School. The Community also employed lay female staff to work alongside the Sisters. Men were employed in the farm to work under the direction of a steward. In the later years, a few male employees were employed to care for the boys, supervising them at play and taking them for walks.

- 13.07** This Institution, like its counterpart, St Joseph's, Kilkenny, was ahead of its time. Some of the Sisters of Charity received proper childcare training in a year-long course in London. The records indicate that two Sisters from St Patrick's went to London for a refresher course in 1956 and introduced the groups system to St Patrick's. It had already been introduced into St Joseph's Industrial School, also located in Kilkenny, which catered for girls up to the age of 16.
- 13.08** In February 1966, the Department of Health wrote to the Superior General of the Sisters of Charity at Mount St Anne's, Milltown, confirming a discussion held the previous month, in which it was agreed that St Patrick's would cease to operate as an industrial school and would be used 'on a permanent basis, as a residential centre for moderately and severely handicapped children – girls and young boys'.
- 13.09** Accordingly, in May 1966 the Superior General gave six months' notice of the Sisters of Charity's intention to resign their certificate as an industrial school.
- 13.10** Thirty boys were transferred to St Joseph's, Kilkenny, some to Artane, and the rest were transferred to other industrial schools. The Sisters received a list of the transfers from the Department of Education, and they wrote back to the Department in July 1966, suggesting a few alterations to the list, as some of the boys had friends and wished to be placed together. The Resident Manager enclosed the modified list for the Department.

Allegations of abuse

- 13.11** The Investigation Committee heard evidence from nine witnesses who were resident in St Patrick's until they were transferred to another institution when they reached the age of 10.
- 13.12** The period of residence of the witnesses in St Patrick's covered the period 1943 to 1966, when the School closed. Three witnesses were in the Institution in the mid to late 1940s; the remaining six were resident in the late 1950s and early 1960s. The majority of the witnesses were in the Institution from the age of 4 to 10 years.
- 13.13** Apart from the correspondence in the 1940s relating to children's failure to gain weight and going barefoot, the Department did not appear to have had any concerns about this Institution. Each of the witnesses was transferred to another industrial school and had serious complaints to make about the later institution. All of them had been committed to St Patrick's when they were nine years of age or younger. Their memories of life in the Institution were, therefore, vague. Nevertheless, many of them had very specific memories of incidents that occurred during their time there, which helped form a picture of St Patrick's.

Allegations of physical abuse

- 13.14** A complainant who was in St Patrick's in the 1940s recalled the Institution before it was divided into the group system:

It was a kind of a – it was a real institution, like. You know, like an orphanage, that's how I felt. It was a very harsh regime as regards discipline ... I remember we were in the – it was like an auditorium that we were in. First thing in the morning before school we would do our catechism. We had to learn our catechism ... I remember one little boy ... he forgot his catechism. He couldn't remember what it was and the sister that was doing the catechism – I can't remember, I wouldn't be sure of her name. It could have been Sr Tyra.¹ She gave him, like, a beating in front of all of the boys. We were all sort of sitting there. She said "I am going to make an example of this boy and this is what you will get

¹ This is a pseudonym.

if you don't remember your catechism". She beat him with a billiard cue ... Full length billiard cue, yes. That was the one major incident I can remember at that school.

13.15 He said the beating took place in the front of a large hall where all the boys could see it:

He was brought down to the front where everyone could see him and the nun got this billiard cue. She made him bend over and she gave him a hell of a beating. Obviously we were terrified of seeing this.

13.16 The witness believed the boy was about seven or eight when this happened: 'We were ever so small. We were really tiny in size'.

13.17 This incident stood out in his mind:

Well, I could still hear, even still today I can still hear the swish of a billiard cue. She swung it around with all her might. You could hear the wind going through the billiard cue and the little fellow screaming. It's sort of something you wouldn't forget.

13.18 That was the most severe beating he remembered in St Patrick's. Lesser physical punishment was administered for failure at lessons. It was, he said, 'Less severe, they would get the back of the ruler'.

13.19 This complainant recalled being fearful during his time in St Patrick's:

Well, it was a very harsh regime. The discipline was, you know, they were very – you were just frightened. You were just frightened because you would get a belt for any little thing. If you stepped out of line on anything or you were in the wrong place you would have to explain yourself. Just like, an atmosphere of fear, really, prevailed in the place, you know.

13.20 He recalled being punished:

Oh, yes, you would get plenty of slaps. You would be slapped any time you stepped out of line. I don't know what we would do to get it. I can't recall why I would be slapped. You had to toe the line. It was a very strict regime.

13.21 He said that all the nuns were not bad and he recalled some good ones. Overall, there was strict discipline:

The Reverend Mothers, they were generally austere people. You saw them just fleetingly. Of course, these places were run almost, you would say, military lines. You could feel that there was a chain of command. They were very organised, very precision running places; you know. Apart from there wasn't much stimulation or there wasn't – I wouldn't say there was happy memories there, really. You were just there and that was it, like. Up against maybe the remaining orphanages we were probably living in heaven. That's all I can say.

13.22 A witness who was there in the 1940s and 1950s differentiated between the lay teachers and the nuns:

You see, the teachers didn't used to really punish you. They were pretty good, the teachers were. The nuns used to come and repeatedly hit you if you stood out of line.

13.23 He said that this punishment was hard and frequent.

13.24 A complainant, who spent seven years in St Patrick's until he was transferred to another industrial school in the mid-1960s, described the punishment he received for bed-wetting:

I suppose what I would like to talk about was the punishments I received as a child when I wet the bed ... It happened for most of my time when I was in St Patrick's. The punishment I received for wetting the bed was I was put into a galvanised bath down near the toilets, this was full of Jeyes Fluid, and a bucket was put into the bath and the water poured over my head and I was made sit there for five minutes. As I got out of the bath I was beaten on the behind.

13.25 He said that this cold bath and physical punishment continued daily, from the age of five to the age of 10:

I suppose every morning when I got up it was something I knew I would have to face, this punishment for wetting the bed. There was nights where I did get up and I was terrified to go to the toilets, it was easier just to wet the bed.

13.26 During his time there, corporal punishment was administered for misbehaviour:

I received severe beatings when I was, as they say, bold. One of the things the nuns sort of enmeshed into the boys, into me, when I go to [another industrial school] to the Christian Brothers, they would teach me manners. By the time it did come to the stage when we would be going to [another industrial school] we were terrified of [another industrial school] before we ever went there.

13.27 Another complainant, who was in St Patrick's in the 1960s, was committed by the courts for stealing when he was eight years old. He was brought down handcuffed by two Gardaí. He described what happened to him:

When I went out first I was frightened, I was nervous, I was crying for several nights wanting to go home and that and I started wetting the bed. The nun used to come and stick my face in it. Then she would start calling me two and three times a night to go to the toilet. That went on for quite some time there.

13.28 He explained that he had not suffered from this problem before coming to St Patrick's, apart from once or twice. In St Patrick's it was a regular problem. He said that he was called out regularly during the night, and that meant he did not wet every night. On one occasion, a nun tied him up with a towel because he was wetting so much:

If I couldn't stay in the bed without wetting it then she would put me in a place where I could wet all I wanted and it wouldn't make any difference. That was the kind of attitude that was taken ... I went out to the toilet after the one gave me a belt on the back of the neck to get me out of the bed. She followed me out to the toilet, I was lying on the floor and she pulled my legs up on the rails and tied my legs to the rails, I was upside down. She went out and closed the door. I thought I was going to be left there all night. That was it. It could have been five minutes or five hours, I don't know. She came back in then and put me back in the bed.

13.29 Shortly after that incident, he ran away from St Patrick's:

It was shortly after the hanging me up by the feet, because not only was I going to bed nervous but I also was wondering was this going to happen again or would she leave me there, call me earlier, leave me there longer. I didn't know. I had to try and get away.

13.30 He got as far as Kilkenny station when he was found by two nuns from the convent and brought back: 'I got a hiding', he said, 'I got the head boxed off me'.

13.31 This witness had very specific memories of incidents but was not able to remember the names of the nuns. He explained why:

There was two nuns there, I don't know their names. When I was there the people that was there were just nuns. Like, there was no names, there was no – it was Sister this and Sister that ... it was just Sister, Sister, Sister, there was no names that I can remember.

13.32 A witness who was in St Patrick's during the 1960s recalled the punishment for bed-wetting:

My memories are very limited. One of the most profound memories in my mind was being made to stand against a wall for hours and hours on end ... In the end I would end up banging my head off the wall.

13.33 He said that this standing against the wall occurred mainly during the night in the dormitory:

Mostly at night-time. I remember it used to go on until it became dawn outside ... I think it was a standard form of punishment, if you like.

13.34 There would sometimes be other boys with him, and it would be a form of punishment for doing things like wetting the bed. It happened about twice a week and it was also accompanied by physical punishment:

I remember a cane used to be brought down on the palm of the hand ... I remember the sound of the cane as it hit the apron as a warning sort of thing and then you got it.

13.35 When asked whether he had any happy memories of Kilkenny he said:

None at all. I have no other memories of Kilkenny whatsoever.

13.36 A witness, who was in St Patrick's in the 1960s for five years, recalled two lay teachers who inflicted severe punishment:

Ms Adams,² she was a very big woman. One could imagine a child of seven years of age or around that age group, this woman, we wore short trousers in the School at the time, she would open the collar of the shirt, you could have been caught talking in Mass or they would see fit at the time themselves that you would be misbehaving, she would be able to catch you by the collar of the shirt like that (indicating), with the strength of her upper hands she would be able to lift you up that way, upside down. Ms Spencer³ would give you a good beating with a leg of a chair or lump of a stick, whichever she would have at the time. That could happen maybe two or three times a week depending on what way they felt ... It wasn't an isolated, no.

13.37 He explained:

Ms Adams would have held you up and Ms Spencer would have done the beating ... She held you up by the back of the collar of the shirt and trousers being short trousers, she was able to catch the two legs of the trousers and she would hold you horizontally ... Ms Spencer would beat you on the legs and on the bottom with a stick ... A leg of a chair.

13.38 This witness attended school at a local De la Salle National School. He said that three Brothers took the view that the boys from the convent needed toughening up:

They always had the tendency, there was myself and another chap there, you were from the convent, you were maybe soft as in too well looked after and plenty of good beatings with the cane wouldn't go astray on you. It would harden you up and toughen you up for the outside world when you went away from the nuns.

² This is a pseudonym.

³ This is a pseudonym.

13.39 Another ex-resident, who was in St Patrick's in the 1950s, recalled a particular beating of a boy, during which four other boys were required to hold him down:

It wasn't me that was held down. It was one of the boys that was asked to accompany the boy that had supposedly done something wrong to hold him down. One had to hold each hand and the others had to hold a leg each and the nun spanked the boy on that table like that.

13.40 He did not know what had merited the beating:

No, we were playing. And the nun just picked at random, picked four boys to come in with this particular other boy.

13.41 He only recalled this happening on this one occasion, but he was unhappy about it:

I didn't like the idea at all. But to say no was – that was not a possibility either, you couldn't say no.

13.42 When asked whether the nun had struck him with her hand, he replied:

There was an instrument used, yes ... I can't remember. I believe it could have been a stick, there always seemed to be one item used.

13.43 In the classroom the stick was used:

Yes, we used to get slapped on the hand ... Three or four maybe, I can't be sure.

13.44 This complainant also recalled another incident of punishment:

That happened before lights out in the dormitory. A cat or a kitten came in and was running around the dormitory, started climbing up on the curtains and that, three or four of us just hopped out of bed to chase the cat and we were caught doing that by the nun. I believe it was three or four of us, I can't remember for sure. But we were ordered down into a room with a tiled floor on it and we were asked to strip off and lie on the floor. She said she would come back later on and not to move, don't dare move. When she did come back later, I could not tell you how long it was, she gave us each a few slaps on the backside as we were lying on the floor, told us to get dressed. On the way up to the dormitory, we met the head nun and she asked the other nun what were we doing. I remember the nun clearly stating that we were knitting mats. I couldn't believe that a nun would tell a lie to another nun.

He explained that the boys often knitted mats in the School.

13.45 He remembered other children being taken out of the dormitory to be punished, but he did not know what punishment they received: *'No, you very seldom spoke about things'.*

The evidence of the Sisters of Charity

13.46 In the course of her Opening Statement, Sr Úna O'Neill, the Superior General of the Congregation of the Religious Sisters of Charity gave general information about St Patrick's. This included the Congregation's view as to how the Institution operated and what life was like there.

13.47 She was asked about corporal punishment in the School:

Well, slapping was obviously a form of punishment that was used to discipline the children. As far as we can gather it was normally done with the palm of the hand and a cane or ruler was sometimes used.

13.48 She had been unable to establish what other forms of punishment were used, such as placing the children in isolation, but found no evidence of this. In the later years of the Institution, there was a shop and the children could be deprived of pocket money.

13.49 Bed-wetting was a problem:

Indeed, yes, it was a problem. We are quite clear I think as to what happened. We were told that in the earlier days that any older child who wet his bed had to bring down the wet sheets to the laundry in the morning. He might be left standing beside his bed for five to ten minutes when it was discovered that the bed was wet ... Then in the play hall when they lined up to go to school they would have been called out and they would have been slapped for wetting the bed.

13.50 Children who continuously wet the bed were woken up twice at night and were given limited fluids after tea.

13.51 According to Sr Úna, the slapping would have stopped in the late 1950s and 1960s and, after that time, the staff brought down the wet sheets.

13.52 On the general regime she said:

While we know the general organisation and routine of the school it is possible that events occurred of which the sisters and the staff were not aware, although there is no evidence of this in the documentation. I think I said earlier that no matter how much you tried to care for your child or your children even in a family you cannot preclude the possibility of bullying or exploitation or whatever, as we know, tragically. The children were closely supervised but this may not have precluded isolated incidents of rough play, bullying, etc. The harshness of punishment would probably have varied depending on the personality of the staff and the sisters. I'm sure that some of the punishment must have been experienced by the children as harsh and humiliating and unmerited. Undoubtedly each child and each Sister and each member of staff has their own interpretation of what life was like in St Patrick's institution.

13.53 In their final submission after the Phase III hearings, the Sisters stated:

The Committee heard evidence from nine former residents of St Patrick's Industrial School. This school closed in 1966 and the Sisters of Charity were unable to respond to the evidence because, given the passage of time, there was no-one left who could evaluate or respond to these allegations by means of firsthand evidence or even by hearsay.

It is undoubtedly the case that physical punishment took place in St Patrick's but the Sisters of Charity are not in a position to comment on their own behalf as to what occurred. They are prejudiced in that regard due to the delay in these allegations coming to the fore.

13.54 **The Sisters of Charity accept that some excessive punishments were inevitable over the years, but no record of them exists. There was no punishment book in St Patrick's and no record was kept of any punishment, so no contemporary documentation is available. It is impossible, therefore, to judge the extent to which individual memories of St Patrick's were typical of the Institution as a whole.**

Allegations of sexual abuse

13.55 Three witnesses gave evidence of being sexually abused by three different lay workers in St Patrick's, Kilkenny. All three against whom the allegations were made are dead. The Sisters submit that they have been unable, due to the passage of time, to source information to assist

the Investigation Committee with its inquiry into these allegations of sexual abuse. The Sisters did provide a list of former male staff, which corroborated one of the allegations, to the extent that the men named by the complainant were identified as being in the Institution at the time. The names recalled by the complainant were close but not identical to the names of former staff members on the list.

- 13.56** There were no documented cases of children being sexually abused in St Patrick's. The Community annals covering the period 1879 to 1966 contained no records of any incidents of that nature. Sister Úna O'Neill, in the Phase I public hearing, said the first time the issue of sexual abuse was mentioned was when:

in the summer of 1999 a past resident called to St Patrick's for a visit ... He was trying to trace a man whom he said had worked in the laundry in St Patrick's while he himself was a resident. He alleged that the man had abused him sexually and the sister undertook to try and make inquiries which she did, but no-one in St Patrick's remembers the man. That's not to say he wasn't there. Nobody remembered him.

- 13.57** Within a few months, the Sisters of Charity received a solicitor's letter. She explained:

We first became aware of allegations of abuse in St Patrick's I suppose formally on 27th January 2000 when we received correspondence from a firm of solicitors regarding a past resident who had been in St Patrick's and who was alleging abuse.

- 13.58** When the Sisters of Charity received these three complaints, they made a general review of the documents and files relating to St Patrick's. Again, the results were the same:

We found nothing in their files nor indeed in any of the documentation to substantiate the specific allegations that were made by the 11 men who are appearing before the Commission ... There is neither documentary evidence nor is there supplementary evidence from the sisters who would have lived there at the time.

Complainant evidence

- 13.59** One resident, who was in St Patrick's from the mid-1940s to the early 1950s, made allegations of sexual assault against a farmhand. He told the Committee:

His name was Bruce⁴ and he used to look after us at playtime, you know. He always carried a stick with him. There was one occasion where I had 25 on each hand, well several of us had that, we don't know the reason for it. He use to take me down to the hay barn and strip me off and he would strip himself off and, you know, I had to do things to him and he tried to do things to me of a sexual nature ... it happened – six, seven and eight years old, during the summer months mostly ... I knew what he was doing. I didn't feel right, if you know what I mean, but I didn't know what it was all about. I knew I was doing something wrong.

- 13.60** When asked if the perpetrator was a teenager or an adult, he replied:

A teenager I would say ... Small type of fellow, with ginger hair ... [It happened] at playtime. He would take me down to the hay barn. He would just "come along, come with me" and you knew something was going to happen and there was nothing you could do about it; you couldn't go to anybody ... I wanted it to stop, but I didn't know how to go around about it ... he was violent ... He worked on the farm and I think he used to look after the boiler house as well, He was an odd job man if you like ...

⁴ This is a pseudonym.

He would take me up to the hay loft, make me take my clothes off and he take his off. He'd lie me on the hay and he'd started interfering to me and I had to do the same to him. He would lie on me and press up against me and all that type of thing.

- 13.61** In his statement, he said he had a clear impression the nuns had known what was going on. He explained:

they brought a statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary and we had to go into the classroom. I can't remember the nun's name but she asked me about it, did he do anything to me, did he interfere with me. I had to look at the statue and I said no because I was frightened.

All I know is that there was some of us standing outside and then we was called in. We went through one classroom and it was in the other classroom you had to go in ... I never seen him after that day.

- 13.62** The witness was very explicit about the abuser, the nature of the abuse, and the subsequent investigation. He said he did not know in advance why he was being brought into the classroom 'until I got in there'. The statue of the Virgin Mary 'wasn't normally there, no, and I had to look at it'. He recalled the kinds of questions that the nun asked:

I can remember asking about Bruce, did he ever do anything to me, and I must tell the truth and all this. I remember looking down and shaking my head and saying no.

- 13.63** 'I was too frightened', he added. 'Of Bruce, of getting beaten up and that again'.

- 13.64** From this witness's account, it would appear that the abuse had been detected, and involved several boys, although until then the witness had believed 'I was the only one'. When the investigation was taking place, he recalled, 'I wasn't the only one that went in, I think that quite a few of the young fellows went in'.

- 13.65** He could not, however, recall the name of the nun who questioned him He said, 'I can't remember, I have been trying to think of it. She was in charge of the classes'.

- 13.66** Another witness, who was in St Patrick's from the late 1940s to the early 1950s, and who was under 10 years of age, also alleged he was abused while there. He told the Committee:

there was a lay worker as they call 'em ... As far as I could see he was a handyman, he was working on all parts of the School. ... He was a kind of under handyman to a man called Mr. Fitzgerald⁵ and he used to give him his orders ... I only know his first name, Charles,⁶ I never knew his second name ... Well, he was always abusing boys, always. It was well known amongst the boys themselves. Mr Fitzgerald and him lived in an apartment, they both had a room each, he used to take us in there when there was nobody about and then let us out, you know, tell us to say nothing and let you out when no-one was looking. It was so frequent or so often that the boys, we used to be waiting for it to happen to see who was going to be picked next., that type of thing. You just happened to be nearest to the door or whatever, you know. Whatever opportunity he got you know it was going to happen, 'til one day Mr Fitzgerald caught him letting me out of the door, out of the bedroom. He came back to his bedroom for something and he actually took him out in the yard and he hit him two or three times in the face over it, and he had a black eye for weeks ... I heard Mr Fitzgerald saying, "don't ever let me catch again, I told you about that" ... he caught him with my trousers down and telling me to pull them up, and pushing me towards the door ... Mr Fitzgerald knew exactly what he was doing

⁵ This is a pseudonym.

⁶ This is a pseudonym.

and he gave him a good three or four smacks in the face ... It was the talk of the school for a week about what happened.

13.67 He was able to describe the man:

At that time I would say he was about around thirtyish I suppose, thirtyish mark. I always remember his face, he was like a weather beaten fisherman, he had a wrinkly face. I could put him in his 30s, between 20 and 30, 25 and 30, something like that. Maybe more.

13.68 He did not report the abuse:

there was no-one to tell because the people above you were too, you were frightened of them, you know. I mean you couldn't treat them as a mother or a father, you just couldn't run to them and say "someone done this to me" because you were all in the same boat. When nobody else is saying anything you don't say anything.

13.69 Despite receiving a black eye, the man continued to make advances:

We always thought, "has it stopped?" He tried it again several times. He tried it even after I left the School.

13.70 He said he was followed some time later, when he was in another industrial school, to his home town, and Charles had got him into a field, but he had hit Charles and escaped on his bicycle.

13.71 The third witness to complain of being sexually abused was in St Patrick's a decade later, between the years of the late 1950s and mid-1960s. He also described sexual abuse by a layman employed by the School. He recalled:

The refectory was to the left as you walked down this corridor, to the right hand side there was this door out on to the yard. When you went around the corner there was a boiler house or something and there was a bedroom in there where [he] stayed. He brought me there on many occasions and he sexually abused me. This small one bedroom, just basic, there was a boiler house, very warm building.

13.72 He described what happened:

he used to take his trousers down and he would have me playing with his penis and he would play with his own penis and ejaculate over me and he would play with my penis and kiss the lower part of my body ... [I was] Approximately eight years of age or possibly from seven up to ten years of age. I am not exactly sure of the year.

13.73 When he was asked if he ever mentioned this to anybody in the School, he replied:

No, because I was terrified. He threatened me that he would throw me in the furnace if I said anything. I think his reward to me he used to give me sweets. There was a three wheeled tricycle, a big one. I could have a spin on this, this was something I never had before so this was my reward ... I knew it was wrong but I was terrified.

13.74 In their written Submission after the Phase I and Phase III hearings, the Sisters of Charity wrote:

In relation to St Patrick's, due to passage of the time the Sisters of Charity were unable to source any information to assist the Commission in its inquiry into allegations made by a number of former residents ... These former residents were at St Patrick's between 1943 and 1965. None of them ever told anyone in authority of what had happened to them and the allegations only emerged many decades later. Although one of these witnesses suspected the Sisters knew of abuse by one of the workers, there was nothing in the evidence to suggest that they in fact knew or somehow ought to have detected the activities described by these witnesses. No-one was convicted of abuse at St Patrick's.

There were no records or documents of any kind found anywhere that might have assisted in an evaluation of this evidence. There was no corroboration. For the Sisters of Charity, responding to these allegations was a practical impossibility.

Conclusions

- 13.75** • **There was no culture of facilitating disclosure. Children felt afraid of telling the nuns what had happened, ‘When nobody else is saying anything you don’t say anything’.**

Neglect and emotional abuse

13.76 The witnesses gave varying accounts of their experiences as young children in St Patrick’s. They range from criticisms of the food, clothing and education to acknowledgments that life in St Patrick’s had positive features. All of these men had been separated from their families when they were very young, which affected them all their lives.

13.77 One complainant, who spent seven years in St Patrick’s in the late 1950s and 1960s, said:

To this very day I still don't have a relationship with my family ... As I was saying the nurturing wasn't entered into our lives as children. I felt there should have been more attachment.

13.78 He found working with victims of institutional abuse of great benefit to him:

It has, yes, because I suppose, in one way, [the organisation] makes me feel a bit – or maybe it's the first time in my life I was doing something from here and helping others. I can see some people coming in and I can see myself within these people where I was stuck three to four years ago.

13.79 This complainant, who alleged that he was sexually abused in St Patrick’s, continued to feel isolated. He said there was no-one he could look up to in the School:

It takes many years in your life to sort of pick up the courage to reach out and ask for help. The only help I ever received was when I entered the psychiatric hospital and that's where, I suppose – most of my life I never trusted people in authority, I never trusted Gardaí, teachers, judges, anybody in authority, I would never have trusted them. I suppose when you trust somebody, this would have been because of the sexual abuse, when you trust somebody what do they need in return? That would have been a big part of my pain. Now, I have reached a stage where I am not afraid to reach out and ask for help if I need help, it's okay. It's a long journey and I am still on it ... There was no-one there – I suppose, I don't know, I can only speak on behalf of myself, you can never trust anybody. I just couldn't trust people. Anybody who was kind to you needed something in return and my experience within the industrial School it was sexual favours.

13.80 Another complainant, who was in the School in the 1960s, was asked if he developed an emotional bond with the woman who was in charge of his group:

No, you were treated – you were all treated very much the same. You got into bed and got out of bed. You were told the various routines that were there. You were never given any instructions as regards privileges or anything like that. You were never told when you actually went there that you had privileges, if you were disobedient that these privileges would be taken away ... We never knew what the privileges were. We never got them to have them taken away.

13.81 This witness had been born to an unmarried mother, and he said that, although he never wrote to her whilst he was in Kilkenny, she did visit once a year to see how he was doing. He was asked whether he was shown any tenderness, affection or encouragement in St Patrick’s, and he said

he had not been. He was asked whether he would describe his childhood in St Patrick's as happy, and he said:

It would be hard to describe what one would call happiness when one hadn't had happiness, according to the previous situation I was in. I probably would have found it a little bit more comfortable. It's very hard to describe what a happy childhood is when you come through the system up to that stage, one didn't understand what a happy childhood is.

13.82 He tried to sum up the feeling of powerlessness:

I suppose if one was to look back and describe the impact on the childhood within Kilkenny, it felt very much like – I am describing it from a different aspect, you were like the mouse in the corner of the room and the cat standing back a couple of feet away from you, and this cat is very powerful and tall, the mouse felt small, very weak and very vulnerable, you had no control over anything that was being applied. It would be the same with the cat, the mouse had no control when the cat was going to strike with the claw and kill it. That would be the basis of the regime.

13.83 He was asked if he could single out any nun as having been good to him:

There was – let me think of her name now – there was a Sr Selma⁷ there, I remember. A round faced nun, wore glasses, she was very much into music. She would have taught a lot of bits of music, the melodica and things like that. She would have had a different approach in seeing things. She would have been a younger nun at this stage in her life and the others would have been a good bit older.

13.84 One complainant thought St Patrick's was better than other institutions he went to:

No, St Patrick's compared to the other institutions I was in was not bad, but it was bad enough for me to remember various things. I do have flashbacks when I come across certain smells, certain farmyard things, I do think – and cocoa I can't stand.

13.85 Another ex-resident spoke of the effect of being separated from his family:

Yes, I have contact. My family are like strangers to me. I mean I know them all, I know where they are, but they are just like strangers. I don't know them as brothers and sisters.

13.86 He explained that he had only made contact in the last few years and that he had learnt that his father had been a good father and did not want his children taken away: 'He died of a broken heart'.

13.87 This complainant explained what brought him to the Committee:

Well, I respect the fact that Ireland is doing something about it. I do respect that and it's good to know that you may be able to stop it happening again. What happened was wrong and it shouldn't have happened. I don't blame the people that are around today for what happened then. I am glad that Ireland has been able to grasp the nettle and take it on board and try and do something about it. I applaud the Commission for that ... That's exactly why I am here, to make my point known to you.

13.88 One witness was rescued from abject neglect and brought to St Patrick's.

My father used to very seldom work, he's worked for farmers but very seldom. Most of the time he used to go out playing at the accordion, at the crossroad dances and the Feis Ceoil or whatever, you know. When he'd come home at night – well, before he went out

⁷ This is a pseudonym.

he used to lock us all in the coal hole, the three of us in the coal hole, and let us out when he come in because there was no-one to look after us. One night we got out of the coal hole and I went down to the church [local], there is two churches there, there is, the Friary and the other church, it was Christmas time and I took money out of the crib, the crib money, and bought three Mars bars for myself, [and two sisters] in one of the shops. Somebody reported me buying them because they knew us around there that we never had anything and that's actually why we were sent away, I think. He always locked us in the coal hole. I remember that time when we were being arrested, that's the only time I ever remember the priest or the police getting involved ... Not out of the theft in the church but out of being seen buying the Mars bar and everybody knew we shouldn't have had money to buy them, you know ... From there on I suppose we were kept an eye on and we were eventually sent away because of that. We were always scruffy, we never washed. Our hair – actually I had nits and lumps, all kind of scabs on my head when they sent me away. I can remember that, being washed and cleaned and you had your head shaven and that, you know.

- 13.89** On an application to court by the ISPC, two of the children were put into care, but the oldest girl of 14 years was kept at home:

There was three of us taken, my oldest sister, my other sister and me, and two of us were sent away because they said my oldest sister had to stay to look after my father, he had no-one to look after him. She stayed there to look after him and we were sent away.

- 13.90** He spoke about the great relief he felt at being listened to and believed:

Well, the only thing I want to add really is I feel very relieved after 40 years, I used to tell people sometimes when I was drunk in the pub, you know. You would meet somebody and they would bring something up and you would kind of ... you could see it in their eyes that their weren't listening to you, they would be looking at you like a zombie, either straight through you or over your shoulder. The next day I would feel sorry for telling them. It might take me a week to get over the guilt of him knowing and telling someone else because they didn't listen. In the last two or three years since I have had counselling and all I have noticed people listening, looking at you straight in the eye and listening to you. That has made a big difference to me in my confidence. It has made me feel that I can move on, which is something I never felt before ... Belief is the main word in this, belief, or listening. Not even belief but actually listening and saying "oh, did that happen to you" ... People seem to have changed because whether they just wanted to – people used to look at me and say that happened inside walls, it's got nothing to do with me. Now people are saying, they are looking through the wall or over it. They are listening to you. You are not talking gobbledegook or things like that. The difference that has made to me is unbelievable.

- 13.91** Another ex-resident, who used to receive occasional visits from his older sister, recounted a story that had left a lasting impression:

My sister ... came to visit me there once and we were going through the School and passed by the kitchen and the kitchen door was open. There was an old nun at the sink and I remember [my sister] asking me if I wanted a drink of water. I said I would love one. She asked the nun, I couldn't believe she had the nerve to ask the nun for a drink. The nun came over and asked if I would rather have a glass of milk instead of water. I couldn't believe that she would ask me if I wanted a glass of milk. I thought that was the greatest thing ever. It's the only time I ever remember getting a glass of milk.

- 13.92** Although he had no memory of the food he got in St Patrick's: 'That glass of milk sticks out like anything'.

13.93 This complainant said that the children were afraid to ask for a glass of water in the summertime. He said that they would get water out of the toilet cistern rather than ask for it:

The cistern is the part up top that stores the water and you pull the chain, it had a chain on it. There was four or five cubicles with a partition between each. I can't remember exactly how many cubicles there were or how many toilets there were. The cubicles did not reach the wall and we used to – two of us, one would stand on the toilet and the other would give us a lift up and we would sit on that partition wall and lean across and scoop the water into our mouth from the cistern. I would get down then and give him a hand to get up to get the water out.

13.94 When asked why he did not ask for a glass of water, he explained:

You dare not ask, you just did not ask for things in that School ... There used to be buckets of water taken out by this man, I remember, but it wasn't often enough.

13.95 A subsequent occasion, when the witness was in another industrial school, illustrated the relationship he had with the nuns in St Patrick's:

Guinness put on a show at Christmas time and boys from the schools were asked to either do something on stage for entertainment for everyone. I was learning how to Gaelic dance at the time so a Christian Brother asked me if I'd do some dancing so I did. When I got back to my seat I turned around and there was two nuns I remembered from Kilkenny coming towards me. My first reaction was "what the hell have I done now?" They came over and just asked me how I was. They were a bit disappointed that I danced and didn't sing and that was all. I was glad that was all was the problem.

13.96 When he saw the nuns coming towards him, he assumed he was going to be punished for something.

Physical care

13.97 The fact that the complainants had all been in St Patrick's as very young children meant that, although they had specific memories, they did not recall general conditions in the School. From the documentation, St Patrick's appeared to be a well-run institution.

13.98 In the first record of a General Inspection, dated 22nd April 1939, Dr Anna McCabe visited the School and found the children well cared for and well looked after. There was plenty of good quality food and the children were well clothed.

13.99 In September 1940, the Bishop of Ossory, Bishop Patrick Collier, wrote to the *Kilkenny Journal* in support of an appeal by the Sisters for charitable funding from the people of the diocese. In that letter, he spelled out very clearly the high regard he had for the work of the Sisters:

Without looking for a penny for themselves, these devoted Religious give their time and talents to their little Charges with a loving care surpassing that of natural parents. It is only just and right that their lives should be kept free from the nightmare of want, and the constant fight to pay their way.

13.100 The Bishop directed that his letter, together with a letter from the Reverend Mother, should be read at all masses. The Reverend Mother's letter was also printed by the newspaper. She explained that St Patrick's had 186 children aged between one and 10. Out of this, only 135 were in receipt of the full State grant of 12 shillings per week. Another 27 were aged between four and six, and were paid for at a rate of 10 shillings per week. In addition, the School had about 24 children under four years of age, for whom the Government did not pay any grant:

These we admit when our room allows, to save them from destitution and the dangers of Proselytism.

13.101 The large number of additional children put a strain on the finances. Industrial schools were not intended for babies but this was a time of great poverty in Ireland and clearly the Sisters were faced with hard choices. The choices made impacted on the level of care available to the children who had been committed by the courts and in respect of whom funding was made available by the State. It was the children as well as the Sisters who made the sacrifices for the babies taken in by St Patrick's.

13.102 The next record of a General Inspection was on 10th December 1943, over four years later. Although it referred to a previous inspection dated 29th November 1942, no record of Dr McCabe's findings in 1942 have survived. She described the School as well conducted, clean and the children well cared for. Her next inspection was dated 5th July 1944, and she requested that the supply of milk to each child be increased to one pint per head per day, and butter to be increased to 6 ozs. She was concerned about the lack of an external fire escape.⁸ She also drew attention to the fact that the children were barefoot in the playground.

13.103 On 19th July 1944, the Department wrote to the Resident Manager pointing out that, although the School continued to be well conducted and the children generally were well cared for, they were not putting on sufficient weight:

He is concerned, however, to note that a number of them have not been putting on weight at the normal rate. It is essential that each child should receive a minimum of one pint of milk per day and should be allowed the full butter ration of six ounces per week, and I am to request you to make the necessary arrangements to have this done.

13.104 It requested that the practice of allowing children go barefoot should be discontinued. Each child was also to be supplied with a toothbrush.

13.105 This letter appears to have called into question the suitability of the Resident Manager because, two months later, it was proposed to replace her with a Sister who was 66 years old. The Department wrote to Dr McCabe seeking her views on the suitability of this appointment. Dr McCabe replied that:

I am not in favour of appointing as Resident Manager old or elderly women as they are too set in their ways and are very difficult to deal with regarding new changes and innovations.

13.106 One Departmental official shared Dr McCabe's concern but felt that, in the absence of 'any specific age rule', it would have to be agreed to. A senior official suggested a solution:

I agree with Dr McCabe that this lady is rather old (over 66 years) to discharge the active duties of Manager of an institution like an Ind. Sch. An appointment of this kind is not subject to the Minister's approval, but he has power (Section 5(4) of the 1941 Act) to request the removal of a R. Mgr. on the grounds of unsuitability, and that power might be availed of in this case if it is decided that the appointment should not be approved.

13.107 The Minister suggested that this should not be framed as a formal request but should be suggested more informally. This action was followed, and a letter was sent by the Department to Managers of St Patrick's in October 1944, referring to the proposed appointment:

It is observed that this Sister is over 66 years old. It is considered that a person of that age would be unable to give the necessary personal attention to the duties which a Resident Manager of an Industrial School is expected to discharge. In the circumstances,

⁸ February 1943: the Cavan Industrial School fire – 35 children died.

it is requested that a younger member of the Community be appointed to the position as soon as possible and that the new appointment be notified to the Department.

- 13.108** The appointment of the older nun did not proceed, and a younger Sister, Sr Frida,⁹ was appointed instead.
- 13.109** In March 1945, two letters were sent to the Department defending the Sisters' decision to allow the children go barefoot in the summer, and requesting that the Department should reconsider its direction to acquire sandals. One of these letters appears to be from a doctor or pharmacist living locally, and the other was from Dr Peter Birch, the Bishop of Ossory. In a letter which he claimed was unsolicited by the Sisters, Dr Birch asked that the edict in relation to the boys going barefoot be reconsidered. He suggested that the boys loved the freedom of playing barefoot in the summer, and most children in ordinary homes would be allowed this freedom.
- 13.110** This was followed by a letter to the Department from the Resident Manager, where she also took up the issue. The Department consulted Dr McCabe and suggested that perhaps a compromise could be reached, whereby children over six years of age could go barefoot. Dr McCabe was not willing to stand down on the issue. Her main reason for this was the danger of infections from cuts and bruises – in particular, tetanus.
- 13.111** The Department wrote to the Resident Manager on 14th March 1945, and refused to change its position on the matter. It suggested that sandals could be acquired from the boot suppliers. In an addendum to her General Inspection Report dated 14th March 1945, Dr McCabe made an additional note dated 11th April 1945, where she noted the difficulty the Resident Manager was experiencing in obtaining sandals. She conceded that, if they could not be procured, she would make an exception to the rule for the summer months only. Despite obtaining a number of samples, and several months of correspondence, it appears that no suitable sandals could be found, and the rule was relaxed for the summer of 1945.
- 13.112** From 1945 until 1964, Dr McCabe visited St Patrick's annually and was generally pleased with how the School was run and the condition of the buildings. She repeatedly stated that the children were very well cared for and happy. Improvements to the buildings were being made constantly, and the accommodation and equipment were very good. In the late 1950s, the group family system was introduced and the children were divided into three groups. Dr McCabe described the new group system as very satisfactory.
- 13.113** For some of her inspections, Dr McCabe did not generate a separate report but simply made an addendum to the previous Inspection Report, saying that the School was running well. She appeared to visit the School very regularly. A single report covered the period from March 1961 to June 1963, and against each of four entries is stated, 'Very well run school. Children very well cared'.
- 13.114** Each category of inspection is graded 'v.good', with Health achieving 'excellent'.
- 13.115** A review of the Medical Inspection files for the relevant period shows that Dr McCabe was satisfied with the health of the children and the attention being paid by the Sisters to record keeping. Furthermore, in one instance, the Sisters paid for private treatment of over 40 children.
- 13.116** One complainant who was in the Institution during the 1940s, which was the period criticised by Dr McCabe, shared her views on the food there:

⁹ This is a pseudonym.

Oh, it was terrible food ... You would get kind of watery soup. There might be bits of celery in it. It used to make me almost heave. Just, maybe, bits of meat and potatoes in it. The food, it wasn't very good. It wasn't something you looked forward to. You had to take it because there was nothing else. So the food was very bad there, I thought ... there was regular meals. You got breakfast, a bit of porridge in the morning. I was like a gruel, watery porridge. Then you got the dinner. Dinner was very poor. Then you got a bit of supper, a bit of bread and jam. That's all I can remember ... Very little meat. I can't remember ever getting eggs or bacon or anything like that. I'd never known food like that.

- 13.117** Another complainant was also in the School during that period. He was admitted in the mid-1940s after the break-up of his parents' marriage:

Well, food, we could have done with a bit more, you know. You didn't get a lot for breakfast, there was only a bit of a slice of bread and a mug of tea. You had a bit of dinner then in the middle of the day and you had the same thing as you had for breakfast later on.

- 13.118** A witness who was there in the 1950s was critical of the food. He recalled:

It was kind of a green mash, it was cabbage stalks and potatoes ... I remember getting that almost every day I was there: Green mash, bread and dripping, watery Cocoa. Egg flip, that was a kind of boiled milk with boiled eggs chopped up and put into it, you were given a ladle of it. There was other stuff they gave, castor oil with molasses in it in a big ceramic jug. The food wasn't that good.

- 13.119** A witness who attended the School in the 1960s was quite clear that he had fared better in St Patrick's than he would have at home:

I know myself that you got food on a regular basis there; you got your breakfast, your dinner, your tea and you got cocoa going to bed. Food was not a problem there, I never felt hungry there. I might have felt frightened but I never felt hungry.

General conclusions

- 13.120**
- 1. It was not possible for a handful of nuns to give an appropriate level of care to nearly 200 very young boys, irrespective of how hard-working and dedicated they were.**
 - 2. There was no accountability in the administration of punishment.**
 - 3. The authorities in St Patrick's failed in their duty to keep proper records. The absence of documentary evidence, accordingly, does not mean that there was no abuse.**
 - 4. Record keeping is part of the duty of care and is intended to make an institution accountable. The absence of records has put both the Sisters of Charity and the witnesses at a disadvantage.**

