

## Chapter 9

# St Joseph's Industrial School, Clifden ('Clifden'), 1872–1983

---

### Establishment and history

- 9.01** The Sisters of Mercy established a convent and an orphanage for girls in Clifden, County Galway in 1861 at the request of a local priest. Clifden is located in a remote area approximately 50 miles west of Galway. A branch house was later set up in neighbouring Carna. The orphanage was certified as an industrial school for girls on 15<sup>th</sup> July 1872.
- 9.02** The Mercy Convent in Clifden formed one of five independent units of the Mercy Congregation within the Diocese of Tuam. From its formation in the late 19th century until 1971, it had its own governance structure and was completely autonomous. The convent was overseen by the Archbishop of Tuam. In 1971, the five Mercy convents in Tuam amalgamated to form one diocesan unit, in line with similar changes taking place throughout the country within the Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy.
- 9.03** The photographs and plans provided by the Sisters of Mercy show the Industrial School as a large imposing building, with the convent immediately adjacent.
- 9.04** The original two-storey orphanage building was constructed in 1862, and various additions were made to it over the years. In 1873, after it had been certified as an industrial school, an additional wing was built and, in 1880, a new internal national school and dormitory were erected. In 1886 a kitchen, pantry, dairy, lavatory and infirmary were added. The next major extension to the premises took place in 1933, when four classrooms were added. This was the internal national school, where the Industrial School children were taught. Just yards away, within the grounds of the complex, stood Scoil Mhuire national school, where the children from the surrounding district were taught. Eventually, in 1969, some 33 years after Justice Cussen recommended in his report that, where possible, children in industrial schools should attend local national schools, the two national schools amalgamated.

### Staff and management

- 9.05** Most of the Sisters in Clifden had completed secondary school education and, on entering the Congregation, many went on to train as teachers in Carysfort Training College.
- 9.06** As each convent within the Congregation formed its own autonomous unit, the Resident Manager and Sisters appointed to work in the Industrial School had to be drawn from the pool of Sisters available in the mother house in Clifden and Branch house in Carna. The Mother Superior of the convent made the appointments.

- 9.07** There were three Resident Managers in Clifden during the period under review: Sr Alma<sup>1</sup> held the position of Resident Manager until her retirement in 1942, and was succeeded by Sr Roberta,<sup>2</sup> who held this post until 1969; and Sr Sofia<sup>3</sup> then took over as Resident Manager until 1984, following the resignation of the certificate by the School in 1983. During Sr Roberta's 27-year reign, she also held the position of Mother Superior for two terms, her last term ending in 1971 when the five Mercy convents in the Diocese of Tuam amalgamated. Clifden was very influenced by the personal qualities of Sr Roberta, who ran the School in a strict authoritarian manner. Her departure from the School coincided with the opening-up of the whole industrial school system that occurred after the Kennedy Report in 1970.
- 9.08** A significant factor in the running of Clifden was the enormous workload undertaken by Sr Roberta. According to the evidence of the Congregation, she worked long, punishing hours in the Institution. Whilst this can be seen as laudable on the part of the Sister, she was not able to care for the children properly and did not seek extra help from the local convent.
- 9.09** Until 1969, when the two national schools amalgamated, three teachers were assigned to teach in the internal national school. They had little or no involvement with the children outside school hours. There were usually three or four Sisters, including the Resident Manager, appointed to work full-time in the Industrial School. Their duties ranged from supervising meals to working in the kitchen, bakery, nursery and laundry. Until 1969, the religious staff worked seven days a week, with little or no holidays.
- 9.10** The Sisters were further aided by lay staff, some of whom were former residents. There was an average of eight to 10 former residents who stayed on to work in the Industrial School at any one time. Most of these left some time in their 20s. They had no formal childcare training and completed their education at primary school level. The profile of lay staff changed in the 1970s, when professionals such as teachers and care workers became involved with the School.
- 9.11** There was no childcare training available in Ireland until the 1970s, when a full-time childcare course commenced in Kilkenny in 1971.<sup>4</sup>
- 9.12** Sr Renata<sup>5</sup> completed a childcare course in Kilkenny in 1974, and Sr Sofia and Sr Olivia<sup>6</sup> attended an in-service training course in Goldenbridge on Saturdays the same year.

### **Children**

- 9.13** The majority of children sent to Clifden were committed by Orders of the District Court under the provisions of the Children Acts and School Attendance Act. Children were committed to Clifden from all over the country notwithstanding its isolated location. There was no train service beyond Galway City and the town was served by an infrequent bus service. In 1933, the School was certified to take 100 girls over the age of six. The accommodation limit was fixed at 120 girls. In 1937, the School accommodated 142 children, although, until the mid-1950s, the numbers remained at or approximately 120.
- 9.14** In 1944, the Department of Education changed its system of paying capitation grants to industrial and reformatory schools, from a system of payment according to the number of children they were certified to accommodate, to one under which the schools were paid according to the number of children actually accommodated, up to the limit of their accommodation number.

---

<sup>1</sup> This is a pseudonym.

<sup>2</sup> This is a pseudonym.

<sup>3</sup> This is a pseudonym.

<sup>4</sup> See the chapter on St Joseph's and St Patrick's Kilkenny for further details in relation to this course.

<sup>5</sup> This is a pseudonym.

<sup>6</sup> This is a pseudonym.

- 9.15** Sr Roberta applied to the Department of Health in 1956 for the reception of children from the local authorities. Whilst there is no documentary material confirming the approval of her application, it appears that it was granted, and there is a letter from the Department of Education to the Department of Health referring to the School in favourable terms.
- 9.16** On 8<sup>th</sup> June 1959, Sr Roberta applied to the Department of Education for a revision in the certificate to enable the School to accept junior boys. In support of her application, she stated that, if successful, this would enable siblings to stay together rather than being scattered to various schools around the country. She also made similar representations to the Minister for the Gaeltacht, and added, 'For some time past our numbers here have fallen so we are most anxious to get the little boys'. The ISPCC supported the application, describing the School as 'excellent'.
- 9.17** Dr Anna McCabe,<sup>7</sup> the Department of Education Medical Inspector, recommended that the Certificate be revised to accommodate a limit of 140 children, including boys up to the age of 10. Indeed, she described Clifden as a 'particularly good and well run school'.
- 9.18** However, at the eleventh hour, Sr Roberta withdrew her application to the Department, as the Archbishop of Tuam refused to support it. It is not clear why the Archbishop made this last-minute objection, but the following year Sr Roberta renewed her application, this time with the consent of the Archbishop. She explained:
- He has now given us the permission as our numbers have decreased very much since then.
- 9.19** The application was granted, and a notice appeared in *Iris Oifigiúil* on 7<sup>th</sup> October 1960, which stated that the certificate for the School had been revised to allow for the admission of junior boys, and the certified accommodation limit was increased to cater for 140 children. In the 1970s, as numbers diminished, boys were permitted to stay into their teenage years.
- 9.20** During the 1960s, Sr Roberta actively sought new pupils. In response to rumours in 1964 that the Industrial School in Westport was due to close, she wrote to the Department and stated that she 'would be more than grateful if you could see your way to send us a few pupils'. In 1967, she wrote to the Department, thanking them effusively for sending the School five children.
- 9.21** In 1969, during the transitional period when Sr Sofia took over as Resident Manager, the Department reviewed the situation and the official concluded that:
- Clifden is too small a town to accommodate an industrial school that would be as large as St Josephs is at present. It appears to me that maybe 40 or 50 children consisting of boys and girls would be a sufficient enrolment for Clifden industrial school. In the final analysis, the range of necessary services, consisting of schools etc are too restrictive for an institute of this type in a small town.
- 9.22** The Archbishop of Tuam agreed with the proposal to reduce numbers. In 1971, the accommodation limit was reduced to 60 children.
- 9.23** Mr Graham Granville, who was appointed to the position of Child Care Advisor in the Department of Education in the mid-1970s, noted in his Inspection Report of the same year:
- It would appear upon examination of the files etc. that in the past many of the children admitted to Clifden were received into Care to be removed "out of sight out of mind".
- 9.24** This policy in his opinion was applied especially to children of different racial backgrounds.

---

<sup>7</sup> Dr Anna McCabe was the Department of Education Inspector for most of the relevant period.

**9.25** A women's magazine carried a feature in the late 1960s commenting on the fact that there were 13 mixed race children in Clifden out of about 80. By 1980, the profile of the children had changed, in that the majority were local children from the surrounding areas.

### ***Group homes***

**9.26** From the early 1970s, the idea of converting Clifden into a group-home school was suggested. The Department kept a critical eye on the School, after shortcomings in its management were exposed in 1969. The future of the School was reviewed, and it was agreed that numbers should be reduced and the School divided into three groups of between 15 and 20 children, in line with the Kennedy Report recommendations. The Archbishop of Tuam backed the proposal. However, plans were put on hold following a Department inspection in the early 1970s.

**9.27** In the early 1970s, the Reverend Mother, Sr Antea,<sup>8</sup> wrote to the Department offering the use of a vacant building for the purposes of a group home. Nothing appears to have come of this proposal, although the following year the Department put the idea of group homes back on the agenda by agreeing to consider a modest grant towards the project.

**9.28** The concept was referred to in the Department's Inspection Reports in the late 1970s and again in the final Inspection Reports of the early 1980s, but dwindling numbers made the project redundant.

### ***Closure of Clifden***

**9.29** In June 1982, the Resident Manager informed the Department that she had given permission to the Galway Association for the Mentally Handicapped to use part of the Industrial School building for their own purposes. She indicated that this was likely to be a permanent arrangement as the building was too large for the group of 24 children resident in the Industrial School.

**9.30** In 1983, that number had further dwindled to 15, prompting the Resident Manager to write to the Department, stating 'Due to circumstances beyond our control and after consultation with officials of the Western Health Board, and also due to lack of referrals from the Health Board we are reluctantly obliged to close the Home in Mid July'.

**9.31** A report by Mr Ciaran Fahy, consulting engineer, on the buildings and accommodation in Clifden, appears in the Appendix to this chapter.

### ***The Investigation***

**9.32** The Investigation Committee heard evidence in three phases. The first phase involved a public hearing at which Sr Margaret Casey, Provincial Leader of the Western Province of the Congregation of Sisters of Mercy, gave evidence on behalf of the Congregation on 10<sup>th</sup> January 2006. She had no direct involvement with Clifden apart from spending a fortnight there before the School closed down. She drew from the following sources of information in preparing her evidence for the Commission's inquiry:

- archival records held by the Congregation;
- material received from the Commission by way of discovery and complainants statements;
- documentation arising out of litigation proceedings; and
- conversations with Sisters who were part of the Community in Clifden.

---

<sup>8</sup> This is a pseudonym.

- 9.33** In her evidence of 10<sup>th</sup> January 2006, she set out in detail the Congregation's position with regard to St Joseph's Industrial School, Clifden.
- 9.34** In the second phase of the inquiry, the Investigation Committee heard evidence in private hearings from 10 complainants and, at the request of the Sisters of Mercy, from a former resident who had positive memories of her time in Clifden. The Committee also heard evidence during this phase from four respondents, including three members of the Congregation.
- 9.35** Finally, in the third phase of the Committee's inquiry, Sr Margaret Casey again gave evidence at public hearings on 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> May 2006 and was questioned in relation to the Congregation's position in light of the evidence that had emerged during the private sessions.

## Physical abuse

### *Documentary material*

- 9.36** There is one documented case of excessive corporal punishment in Clifden, which relates to an incident which occurred in the early 1980s.
- 9.37** A number of siblings were placed in Clifden and reported incidents of violence towards them by a particular lay worker. One of the girls had sustained bruising to her left buttock, allegedly as a result of being hit with a wooden spoon for being unable to do her homework. This allegation gave rise to a Western Health Board investigation.
- 9.38** The matter arose when the Community Care Team in the area in which the children resided wrote to the Western Health Board. The letter expressed concern about the possibility of the children being sent back to Clifden:
- Our anxiety is that in the event of the parents being unable to cope effectively in the future, the only option open is to return these children to this pathogenic atmosphere.
- 9.39** The Community Care Team requested that 'the quality of caring in this Residential Home for children' be investigated and expressed the opinion that 'this alleged violence is the work of a particular staff member, rather than residential care policy'.
- 9.40** There is no documentation relating to the Western Health Board investigation, except a reference by a Department inspector to the fact that one had taken place. A list of staff members available for this time reveals that this staff member remained in employment in Clifden.
- 9.41** There is no record of a punishment book as required by the regulations being maintained in Clifden. A book was discovered by the Congregation for the period 1933 to 1956, but it does not provide details of any punishments. It is a general commentary on the conduct of the children which, according to this record, was invariably very good.
- 9.42** Sr Margaret Casey confirmed that corporal punishment was a feature of life in Clifden, and she stated that it was the norm at the time. The principal form of punishment was slapping, administered by hand, cane, flat stick or ruler, usually by the Sister on duty. She found no evidence of a policy under which children were sent to the Resident Manager or other senior figures for the administration of punishment, and conceded that punishments were carried out in the presence of other children, usually on the spot. She referred to the punishment book mentioned above, and confirmed it was not maintained after 1956 and was general in nature.
- 9.43** Sr Casey acknowledged that the documented case of excessive corporal punishment referred to above was '*a significant incident*'.

**9.44** She conceded that, with the benefit of hindsight, both the Congregation and individual Sisters regret the use of corporal punishment and recognise the potential effects on these already vulnerable children.

**9.45** In the course of an apology to former residents of Clifden, Sr Casey stated:

*I suppose we do recognise that the children that were committed to our care...were vulnerable and we do recognise that they were traumatised. The system that prevailed in the Industrial School mitigated against giving them the necessary affection and care that their vulnerability required ... It was necessary dealing with such large numbers to maintain order and strict discipline was required. This obviously had a negative effect on the children and unfortunately we deeply regret that this may have been excessive at times and for this we are truly sorry.*

**9.46** All of the complainants who gave evidence alleged physical abuse. They asserted that various implements were used to inflict punishment, including a ruler, cane, a bunch of keys and a towel roller. Allegations were made against members of the Congregation, lay workers and older children.

**9.47** A common thread running through the testimony of the complainants was that punishment was meted out indiscriminately and that this created an environment of fear. One witness, who was a resident for eight years from the early 1950s, stated:

*it didn't really matter what you were beaten for, it was just one of those things, if they saw you there and you weren't doing something then you got beaten for it.*

**9.48** Another witness, a resident for 12 years from the late 1950s, stated that they were punished:

*For nothing, just because they felt like it. If they were angry then they just took it out on you, sometimes you were an innocent victim just sitting there, or just playing and then they attacked you, it all depends on what moods they were in.*

**9.49** A witness, who was committed for just over a year in the early 1960s when she was 12 years old, remarked:

*Anybody got it, it didn't make a difference. If you were just in the wrong place at the wrong time or if you were too slow to get your work down or if you didn't get down the stairs quick enough or if you ran...Anywhere they could get you they would hit you. Mainly on the head. That was the sorest. They would hit you with the keys, that was sore.*

**9.50** Another witness, who was committed to Clifden before she was a year old and spent her entire childhood there during the 1960s and the 1970s, commented:

*I lived in, I think – I watched – I was punished, other kids were punished, I think it was being in an environment controlled in fear. I think I was very afraid of the nuns, very afraid of getting things wrong. I think I was constantly in that state of fear of being punished.*

**9.51** She added that when the anticipated punishment was actually delivered, it came almost as a relief.

**9.52** A witness, who was committed to Clifden in the late 1950s, at the age of 11, and remained there until she was 16, recalled, on arrival with her sisters, being met by a lay worker. The children were told to take their clothes off for a bath. One of her younger sisters was reluctant to be parted from her favourite red boots. The witness tried to prevent the lay worker from taking the boots and she was punched around the head and told that she would not be permitted to back-answer in Clifden. She further alleged that this carer regularly hit her with a bunch of keys.



- 9.53** Another witness, who was in Clifden in the early 1960s when she was 12, described an incident in which she and a boy were confronted by a Sister one afternoon for coming back late. She asked them whether they had had intercourse but they did not understand what it meant. She made the boy pull down his trousers in front of the witness and she beat him with a cane. The witness refused to undergo the same humiliation and tried to escape. The nun pushed her through a glass door. Her hand went through the glass and she banged her chest hard against a brass knob in the door. The Sister proceeded to hit her on the back with a bamboo cane. She did not receive any medical treatment for her injuries. Her chest injury got progressively worse and, when she complained to the same Sister, she was beaten again. Eventually, another Sister discovered the extent of the injury and took her to a doctor. She was admitted to hospital for two and a half weeks. Her family were not informed that she was in hospital. The school record indicates that she was suffering from mastitis, as does a record signed by the GP on the day she was admitted to hospital.
- 9.54** A witness who spent her entire childhood in Clifden during the 1960s and 1970s, made several allegations of physical abuse by the Sisters. She stated that, when she was five, a friend blamed her for bringing a cup of water into the schoolroom, which was forbidden. She was punished by a Sister who hit her with a hand brush. She remembered a number of children who had run away being beaten with a cane by a Sister whom she specifically remembered, as she used to dye her hair in the Institution. This Sister gave evidence to the Investigation Committee and vehemently denied this allegation of abuse.
- 9.55** Sr Olivia,<sup>9</sup> taught the children spelling, and the witness remembered not being able to spell the word 'colour'. The Sister hit her with a hand brush four or five times. She said, '*Sometimes when you cried that seemed to encourage them to hit more*'. She recalled other occasions on which she was beaten by the same Sister, including an incident in which she was beaten for not being able to read a passage from the Bible.
- 9.56** This witness made allegations of physical abuse against Sr Olivia who denied them. Sr Olivia did confirm that her usual method of administering punishment was to slap children. She accepted that occasionally she thumped the children. She added that this did not happen often and she was not aggressive with the children, but accepted that some degree of force was involved and that she would always regret it afterwards. She stated that, if she felt that she had punished the children unfairly, she would talk to them about it afterwards. Sr Olivia did not recall ever speaking to this witness referred to above after a punishment.
- 9.57** Sr Olivia furnished an additional statement dealing with the allegations made against her. In this later statement, she accepted that she occasionally used a hand brush to punish children, whereas in her first statement she stated that she slapped children with her hand only. She explained that initially she was devastated by the allegations made and was confused. She did not want to implicate any other Sister, or indeed herself, by conceding that they used a hand brush to administer punishment. She went for counselling and came to terms with the fact that they had in fact used a hand brush for this purpose. As conditions improved in Clifden, this method of punishment was used less frequently.
- 9.58** She stated that there was no special place where children were sent for punishment. It could happen anywhere. She would resort to the hand brush for punishment when, for example, the Resident Manager was away. Sometimes, she had difficulty controlling children and, rather than face the possibility that the nuns in the convent would tell the Resident Manager, she used the hand brush to restore order. The Resident Manager also used the hand brush, but not as often as she had better control of the children.

---

<sup>9</sup> This is a pseudonym.

- 9.59 Another respondent Sister, who taught the children from the early 1960s, gave evidence that discipline was maintained in the classroom by slapping the children. She used a flat stick called a 'slapper'. If a child was very bold, she would administer two slaps to each hand. Former residents referred to being beaten, whereas she would describe the punishments as being slapped.
- 9.60 The Sister recalled an incident involving a complainant whom she would have regarded as her pet. One day, another Sister came to her with the girl and said that she had misbehaved. She slapped her twice. She felt that the complainant never forgave her for this punishment and their relationship was never the same again. The complainant had made allegations of serious abuse against a number of Sisters including this respondent.
- 9.61 Sr Elana,<sup>10</sup> who taught in Scoil Mhuire from the mid-1950s, and after the amalgamation of the schools, admitted that she did punish children by slapping them on the hands with either a flat stick or a cane. In the late 1960s, she read a series of articles by Dr Cyril Daly published in the daily newspapers, advocating the abolition of corporal punishment. She accepted his views and did not engage in this practice after that.

### **Conclusions**

- 9.62
1. **Control in Clifden was maintained through a regime of corporal punishment that was pervasive and, on occasions, excessive.**
  2. **Punishment was administered for trivial offences and led to a climate of fear in the Institution.**
  3. **In the absence of a properly maintained punishment book, it is not possible to say how much physical punishment occurred in Clifden, although the evidence of witnesses would indicate that it was considerably in excess of what would have been regarded as normal at the time.**
  4. **Former residents and staff confirmed the existence of 'pets' in the Institution. Favouritism in such a setting was damaging and undermining because it resulted in discrimination between children.**

### **Neglect**

- 9.63 There were three Resident Managers in Clifden for the period under review, one of whom held the position for a continuous period of 27 years from 1942.
- 9.64 Until the early 1970s, there were on average three full-time members of staff working in the Institution looking after a large number of children. In the 1970s, the number of staff in the Institution increased, with teachers and care workers being employed from outside the Congregation. Childcare training became available in the 1970s, with a course commencing in Kilkenny and the Sisters in Goldenbridge providing an in-service training course for members of the Congregation.

### **Evidence**

- 9.65 Sr Margaret Casey accepted that the staff-child figures were totally unacceptable by today's standards.
- 9.66 She also accepted that the focus was on material things such as shelter and clothes as opposed to care for the children, and that this was reflected in the staff numbers in the School. She said that the Sisters in the School worked under very difficult conditions without support services. When further questioned in regard to the difficulties encountered in the late 1960s, she conceded that

---

<sup>10</sup> This is a pseudonym.



during this period, *'it would appear that the children were being neglected but I would have seen it more as a management failure than actually neglecting the children'*.

**9.67** Referring to the fact that there was a significant pool of Sisters in the convents in Clifden and Carna Sr Casey stated that each of these Sisters was involved in her own ministry, teaching, nursing etc, or retired or engaged in their own professional training, and that there was in fact no surplus supply to direct to the Institution.

**9.68** Two respondent Sisters referred to staff and management issues in their evidence. One worked in the Industrial School from the late 1960s until it closed and stated that, when she was sent to Clifden, there were 86 children and three full-time members of staff: herself, the Resident Manager and a lay worker. Another Sister helped out on a part-time basis. It was a chaotic and stressful environment, involving long working hours and no holidays. She did not make any representations to her superiors at the time for assistance, and simply managed with what she had. She was very unhappy and did seek a transfer. She was told to *'hold on for a while, you know, that we will get you out of it'*. Matters did not improve until the early to mid-1970s, when a combination of a decrease in the number of residents and an increase in staff numbers succeeded in reducing the pressure. The Sister confirmed that she did not undergo any childcare training until the mid-1970s, when she attended an in-service training course in Goldenbridge.

**9.69** Another respondent, Sr Carmella,<sup>11</sup> who was both teacher and principal in the internal national school from the early 1960s stated that she did not bring any of her concerns to the attention of Sr Roberta who held the posts of Resident Manager and Reverend Mother:

*No, I did not discuss with the Reverend Mother. I just did what the Reverend Mother told me to do and my work was to teach in the School and that was it. That was what was allotted to me and I did what I could there. But it was – the Reverend Mother, she determined the lot of each individual.*

**9.70** She simply did what she was told to do, as Sr Roberta *'was that kind of person that her word was law, she was in authority and that was it'*.

**9.71** She stated that Sr Roberta, the Resident Manager, and Sr Veronica,<sup>12</sup> her Deputy, were strict with the children and could have shown them more compassion. She accepted that the Resident Manager might have appeared frightening to a child, *'she had a very strong voice, her voice alone would frighten you and I say that alone would make a child afraid'*.

**9.72** Sr Carmella accepted that there were some teething problems when a new Resident Manager was appointed in 1969, and recalled the Gardaí calling to the School in relation to an incident. She was asked about a query, in a Department Inspection Report for this period, regarding the reasons behind the shortage of Sisters in the Industrial School, despite the fact that they formed part of a Community of 40 Sisters. Her rationale for this situation was that nobody wanted to work for the new Resident Manager. She reiterated Sr Casey's evidence that all of the Sisters in the convent had their own duties, such as working in the hospital or domestic economy school, or they were retired nuns. There were not any nuns available to work in the Industrial School.

**9.73** In the late 1960s, the Department of Education discovered that, small babies, admitted to the institution, were being sent out to families in the countryside without the consent of the Department or County Council. They sought an explanation from the Resident Manager, who responded that this had arisen as a result of an outbreak of smallpox and the need to isolate the babies. She confirmed that she paid the families £2.00 per week and supplied them with necessities, including

<sup>11</sup> This is a pseudonym.

<sup>12</sup> This is a pseudonym.

baby foods, drops, clothes, prams and cots. She stated that she believed that this course was in the best interests of the children but agreed that it would not happen again.

**9.74** There was a difficult transition period in 1969 when Sr Roberta, the Resident Manager, resigned her post after 27 years and a new Resident Manager, Sr Sofia, was appointed. At that stage, there were 89 children in the School and two permanent staff members. The Acting Inspector of Industrial and Reformatory Schools, Mr Phelan,<sup>13</sup> visited the School in October 1969 and advised the Dublin Metropolitan Children's Court that Clifden was over-crowded and that no further children should be committed there.

**9.75** Following this inspection, the Assistant Secretary of the Department of Education wrote to the Archbishop of Tuam in October 1969, expressing his concern at the staff shortages in Clifden:

My Lord Archbishop,

I am aware of your deep interest in the welfare of the children in St. Joseph's School, Clifden, and on that account I request the assistance of Your Grace in the solution of the following problem relating to the institution.

In the course of a recent visit to St. Joseph's the acting Inspector of Reformatory and Industrial Schools was concerned to find that a group of the older girls were flouting authority by refusing to attend school, by roaming the streets of Clifden after dark catcalling and behaving rudely to their elders and that the Gardaí had visited the school last week with a view to establishing a more disciplined behaviour on the part of the children in residence there.

In the opinion of the acting Inspector, which is shared by Father Costello,<sup>14</sup> a curate in the parish, whom he called on during the course of his visit, the serious deterioration of standards in St. Joseph's is directly attributable to the insufficient staff employed to look after the 85 boys and girls at present in the institution and as a consequence this shortage of staff places an intolerable and unfair burden on the shoulders of Sr. Sofia, who has recently been assigned to manage the industrial school.

To organise efficiently an institution of the size and nature of St. Joseph's, two additional nuns one of whom, if at all possible, should have experience in nursing or child care would need to be allotted full time to assist Sr. Sofia in her duties and extra lay help is also needed in the kitchen and dormitory to the extent decided by Sr. Sofia. It is in connection with the former requirement that I would ask Your Grace to approach Mother Roberta, the Superior of the community in Clifden, to ensure that the two additional nuns referred to above be assigned to full time duties in St. Joseph's as a matter of urgency, if effective control of the older girls is to be restored and a source of grave criticism of the industrial school removed.

In regard to the engagement of extra lay staff as required by Sister Sofia, I would like to make the following point for Your Grace's information, Mother Roberta has been resident manger of the school for a number of years and in this position has received the maintenance grants paid by this Department and the local authorities responsible for the children detained in the school by court order. It seems, however, as a result of the recent inspection that by reason of advancing years and other duties in her capacity as Superior of the convent, Mother Roberta now has little time to devote to the actual day to day care of the children though she still controls the finances of the school. In my opinion this is an entirely unsatisfactory arrangement which must restrict Sr. Sofia in the employment of the extra lay assistance which she so badly needs, and the introduction of the other measures deemed essential if all round standards in the school are to be raised.

---

<sup>13</sup> This is a pseudonym.

<sup>14</sup> This is a pseudonym.

Administratively it would be a simple matter to change the payment of the maintenance grants from Mother Roberta to Sister Sofia but in the particular circumstances of the community in Clifden this change would not be effective unless Your Grace interfered to make it so. Accordingly, I would also ask Your Grace to use your good offices to ensure that the financial control of the maintenance grants paid by this Department and the Local Authorities in respect of the committed children is placed in the hands of Sr. Sofia so that she may have a free hand in her efforts to restore to St. Joseph's School its former high standard of performance in the field of caring for the deprived and underprivileged child.

I have the honour to be, my Lord Archbishop,

Yours sincerely,

Assistant Secretary.

**9.76** The Archbishop duly made representations to Sr Roberta who assured him that extra staff would be deployed in the School.

**9.77** The acting Inspector again inspected the School a few months later and found conditions much improved, as documented in his internal memorandum:

St. Joseph's, Clifden

Rúnai-Cúnta,

On my visit to Clifden Industrial School ... I found that the new manager had made good progress in the task of restoring acceptable standards in the conduct of this school. Numbers have been reduced from 85 to 72, and dormitories were clean and smelt pleasantly and a new locker has been purchased for every child. In the refectory new chairs have been provided and a substantial dinner has replaced the "traditional" bread & tea as the Saturday mid-day meal. Minor improvements in the washing facilities have also been made and Sr Sofia has a programme of painting & decorating, additional heating and a more suitable arrangement of w.c. accommodation in the pipeline. Furthermore she has increased the staff from three to nine and has been successful in placing or transferring six senior girls who had got completely out of hands.

We discussed further reductions in numbers, additional staff who would sleep in and become more involved in the social life of the children and the assistance of an Art teacher who would help plan a more individual colour scheme in the children's dress. Most schools buy in bulk from shops and factories which can effect a saving of up to 35% but can result in the child having to fit the article rather than the opposite. Sr Sofia was advised to postpone structural alterations for the present and to expect a visit next May to discuss the progress of her plans. The Archbishop was to pay a further visit ....

I subsequently saw Fr. Costello C.C. who supports Sr. Sofia in her determination to improve matters in St. Joseph's. Dialogue on most matters will shortly be allowed in the community at Clifden which may reveal why out of a strength of 40 nuns only two are willing to work in the industrial school, though all have taken vows to care for "the poor the sick and the ignorant".

[A] Having seen the chaos which existed with 85 children in residence and insufficient staff & the relative improvement with 72 children and additional staff, I am now moving towards the view that in a small town like Clifden with its limited services and its comparatively isolated position, the number of children who could be successfully integrated in the school life and social activities of the district should be not more than 40-50 (boys + girls) and if you agree, I will discuss this question on the phone with Sr Sofia. In the meantime I am asking [a], Kindergarten Organiser to call on Sr Sofia and advise her on the employment of the children's time outside school hours.

[Handwritten notes at bottom of page]

Since writing this report Sr. Sofia phoned to say that the Archbishop had visited ... & she felt he would like to be informed of the results of the recent inspection. In view of his continuing interest it might be well to put the proposal at A above to him in the first instance together with the recent views on the school.

- 9.78** The Archbishop was kept informed of developments and agreed that, ultimately, numbers would have to be reduced.
- 9.79** A further inspection some five months later reported that five Sisters worked part-time on a regular basis in the School, and an additional Sister had been appointed on a full-time basis.
- 9.80** Dr Anna McCabe was appointed Medical Inspector of Industrial and Reformatory Schools in 1939 and held the post until 1965. She also carried out General Inspections of the schools.
- 9.81** There are General Inspection Reports available for most of the 1940s and 1950s. All of these reports, without exception, refer to Clifden in glowing terms. Year after year, it is referred to as an excellent and extremely well-conducted school. The Resident Manager, Sr Roberta, and her deputy, Sr Veronica, are also praised and referred to as very capable and kind. The last Inspection Report by Dr McCabe with regard to Clifden is dated 1962.
- 9.82** Sr Casey and complainant witnesses testified that inspections were notified to the school in advance and that conditions were improved for the visits.
- 9.83** Dr McCabe carried out Medical Inspections at the same time as the General Inspections, and these are documented separately. All of her Medical Reports are very positive.
- 9.84** The local GP completed Quarterly Medical Returns for the Department which noted that the health of the children was excellent, their diet varied and they were well nourished, clean and neat in appearance. The children were taken for walks and drives in the countryside and the accommodation was in good condition.
- 9.85** Dr C E Lysaght was contracted by the Department of Education to conduct one-off inspections of industrial and reformatory schools in 1966. He provided a detailed General and Medical Inspection Report in regard to Clifden after an inspection in 1966.
- 9.86** Overall, his report was very positive. He asked why the industrial school children were taught separately from the local children and was told by Sr Veronica that this was the way it had always been and that, in any event, the local primary school was too small to cater for them.
- 9.87** There was a hiatus in inspections until 1969, when the Acting Inspector visited the School and was alarmed to find it overcrowded and understaffed.
- 9.88** It is apparent that the reports of the acting inspector were more child-centred than those of his predecessors, who tended to concentrate on the physical aspects of the Institution as opposed to the standard of care provided to the children.
- 9.89** Mr Graham Granville was appointed to the position of Child Care Advisor in the Department of Education in the mid-1970s. He conducted five inspections of Clifden between the mid-1970s and the early 1980s. In general, these reports were positive although he expressed concern about the aftercare and the socialisation of the children into the community.

## **Food**

- 9.90** Sr Casey said she had spoken to two Sisters who expressed concern about the adequacy of the food in the School in the mid-1960s. She accepted that, in the 1950s and through to the early 1960s, the food was very basic; at teatime they had bread, butter and jam every day.
- 9.91** Most of the complainants made allegations regarding the poor quality and quantity of food in Clifden. Many of the witnesses recall always being hungry, and resorted to stealing food intended for the farm animals and bread from the bakery.
- 9.92** Another former resident, who spent her childhood in Clifden during the 1960s and 1970s, stated that conditions changed in 1969 when a new Resident Manager was appointed. There seemed to be more money and they never went hungry. This contrasted with previous years, when she recalled always being hungry and eating food destined for the pigs. However, with the regime change, she recalled *'another type of panic around food, because we had to eat what we got and if we didn't eat it we got lashed. Well, I got hit. I remember get – being beat because I couldn't eat my food'*. She recalled, in particular, being beaten by one Sister for not eating her food quickly enough, but this Sister denied hitting the witness or any other child across the face for not eating their food quickly.
- 9.93** One respondent who gave evidence was a national schoolteacher who had taught children in Carna national school before being transferred to Clifden internal national school in the early 1960s. She stated that, in comparison with the children in Carna, the Industrial School children were well fed and clothed.
- 9.94** In its Submissions, the Congregation concedes that:
- in view of the repetition of complaints about food, and the evidence of certain particular complainants such as [the complainant named] it seems likely that hunger was a real issue for the children in Clifden industrial, at least up to a certain period of time, perhaps the late 1960's ... The food does not seem to have been adequate in quantity to satisfy the appetite of the children. It is accepted that children probably did, on occasion, steal loaves of fresh bread and extra portions of food whenever they could.

## **Education**

- 9.95** In 1939, a Preliminary Report was carried out by a Department Inspector into the feasibility of amalgamating the internal national school and the local national school, Scoil Mhuire, which were located yards from each other within the same grounds. The manager of both schools, Mother Alma, was open to the idea, but expressed reservations about the attitude of parents of children in Scoil Mhuire to the proposal.
- 9.96** The Department Inspector reported in May 1942 that while in his view it was perfectly feasible to amalgamate the two schools:
- The Rev. Mother of the Community, Mother Alma, who is manager of both schools, and the principal teacher of the Convent N.S. are all three opposed to the idea of having the pupils of both schools taught together, mainly because they fear that the parents of the children attending the N.S. would object. I think it likely that there would be some such objection.
- 9.97** Furthermore, £4,000 had recently been spent on upgrading the Industrial School classrooms, which would be wasted if an amalgamation took place. The inspector concluded that, 'In my opinion, the pupils of the Industrial School would not gain, educationally or otherwise, by being taught along with the pupils of the other school and I do not think the present arrangement should



be altered'. The Department accepted the conclusions of the inspector and the status quo would remain unchanged until July 1969 when the two schools were amalgamated.

**9.98** In 1972, the Sisters expressed dissatisfaction at the lack of post-primary educational facilities in the area, and in particular the lack of vocational training. They maintained that this had impeded the development of the Industrial School. The Department investigated the matter and was reasonably happy with the facilities available. A vocational school replacing the two secondary schools in Clifden was opened in the mid-1970s.

**9.99** Sr Casey stated at the Phase I public hearing:

*Up to the '60's the level of education was generally that of Primary Cert, but there was industrial training provided as well and the children would have been expected to engage in significant amounts of domestic work depending on their age, such as the laundry, kitchen and bakery and at any given time a child would have helped on the farm. These things all of them together would undoubtedly have made the children feel that in some sense their childhood was thwarted or stunted.*

**9.100** She added that, in the 1970s, there was a drive to ensure that those children who were capable and interested in pursuing post-primary education were given the opportunity to do so. Again, during the 1970s, children were sent to different schools in the locality, or indeed sent to boarding school, in an effort to minimise the institutional nature of their upbringing and enable them to mix with other children.

**9.101** Sr Casey accepted that it would have been better, from a socialisation point of view, if the children had been amalgamated with the local national school children back in 1942 when the issue was first raised. It was put to her that the reasoning behind objecting to the amalgamation reflected less a concern for the welfare of the children and more an interest in preserving the financial investment which had been made in the School. Sr Casey accepted that this was one interpretation of the matter.

**9.102** Many of the complainants gave evidence as to the inadequacy of the standard of education they received in Clifden.

**9.103** One witness, who was committed to Clifden in the early 1950s at the age of seven and spent eight years there, stated she was continuously reprimanded in class, both physically and verbally, to the extent that she found it impossible to learn anything. In one particular class, she regularly had to stand in a corner wearing a dunce's hat. She has difficulty reading and writing to this day. As regards practical skills, she learned to cook and do laundry work. The only training she received in preparation for life after Clifden was domestic training.

**9.104** Two other witnesses complained that an over-emphasis on religious studies deprived them of other educational skills. One of these witnesses was five years old when she was sent to Clifden in the late 1950s. She stated:

*You were drilled with religion and if you didn't know it that you got beaten and that you had to stand on the desk or kneel down and face the blackboard or face the wall, turn around against the wall ... we didn't go on to the Leaving or Inter or anything. We were not even able to read or write when we left the Institution. It was just sheer luck that we did survive. We had the survival skills but we did not have the educational skills.*

**9.105** She also alleged that she was taken out of class to take care of young children. The second witness, who was committed to Clifden in the early 1960s and spent just over a year there, described the Sister who taught her as vicious. She had a bamboo cane, which she used with



great zeal if the children did not know their lessons. She concentrated on religious studies. She alleged that they spent more time trying to avoid beatings than learning.

**9.106** The Congregation denied that there was an emphasis on religious studies and that children were taken out of class to engage in domestic chores.

**9.107** Another former resident in Clifden, who was committed in the late 1950s at the age of 10 and remained there until she was discharged at the age of 16, also alleged that she often worked in the nursery during school hours. She stated that the standard of her education did not improve on what she had been taught prior to being committed. The school records indicate that her reading, writing and calculation were 'basic' when she came to the School, but she insisted that her abilities in these areas were very good at this stage. She also asserted that, when she sat the Primary Certificate, all of the children copied from each other with the full knowledge of the supervising Department inspectors. The Congregation submits that this latter allegation is utterly implausible.

**9.108** A complainant who spent her childhood in Clifden during the 1960s and 1970s gave evidence in relation to the Sister who taught her in 6<sup>th</sup> class:

*we were terrified of her because she was very cruel. I used to be dreading going into her class because she used to teach in 6<sup>th</sup> class and I spend years dreading going into her class because I feared that she would punish me.*

**9.109** When she finally did go into 6<sup>th</sup> class, she found that she was not afraid of the teacher. In fact, the Sister ignored her completely in class because she gave backchat on one occasion. She does not recall ever being beaten by her, nor witnessing another child being beaten in class. However, the witness does recall Sr Elana 'lashing' children for attempting to run away. She stated that this Sister had a reputation of targeting the industrial school children for punishment.

**9.110** This respondent, Sr Elana, remembered the complainant as a quiet girl. She accepted that she was strict in class but maintained that this was necessary to preserve order. When the two national schools merged in 1969, she felt that some of the industrial school children would have benefited from remedial teaching which was not available at that time. She did not have any time to give special attention to pupils in need.

**9.111** Another Sister, Sr Carmella, felt that the School was under-staffed. The children did not achieve as well academically as their peers in Scoil Mhuire.

**9.112** She said that no real efforts were made to deal with the fact that the industrial school children were behind educationally in comparison with the pupils in Scoil Mhuire. She helped them with their study in the afternoons and another Sister, who was partially blind, helped with reading, spelling and tables, but that was the extent of the assistance given. She stated that they did eventually catch up with the other pupils. Ultimately, the amalgamation improved them in every way, 'Their outlook, their behaviour and everything. They learned from the other children'.

**9.113** Despite the apparent emphasis on educating the children, most of them were destined for a life in some sort of domestic service. Sr Carmella's explanation was that such an outcome was never questioned: 'I think the order of the day was that in the end of it they were going to end up as domestics'. Sr Roberta, who held the position as Resident Manager until 1969, decided who would go on to secondary school. She would have liked to have seen more children go on to further education.

**9.114** Sr Carmella stated that chores did not interfere with their schooling and were carried out before and after school. Girls between 14 and 16 years of age took part in a domestic economy course.

The children were taught music after school and there was an emphasis on musical education in the School. She was not of the view that inordinate pressure was put on the children with regard to their performance for the Christmas concert and thought that they quite enjoyed the preparations.

**9.115** She denied that there was a marked emphasis on religious education over other subjects, and stated that half an hour every day was given towards religious education. The School followed the national school curriculum and was subject to Department inspections.

**9.116** On the question why the children did not fare better academically, the Congregation submitted that the following factors should be taken into account:

- The psychological and emotional state of these vulnerable children, as well as the effects of institutionalisation, which would have had repercussions on their ability to learn.
- The pre-existing standard of education of children who were older when committed.
- The absence of remedial facilities.
- The effects of corporal punishment and such practices as wearing a dunce's hat.
- The absence of motivation where there were no post-primary educational opportunities and the emphasis in the industrial training provided focused largely on a future in domestic service.
- The gap between what the prescribed curriculum offered and the needs of children in institutional care.

**9.117** • **The standard of education in Clifden was below that available in local national schools. The failure to amalgamate the children with local children for national schooling caused disadvantage, both socially and educationally. The interests of the local community and the Congregation were placed ahead of those of the children in care. Excessive corporal punishment had a damaging effect on institutionalised children. It would appear that children in Clifden were regarded as suitable for domestic work and trained accordingly. The Congregation was correct to draw attention to the 'effects of corporal punishment and such practices as wearing a dunce's hat'.**

### ***Chores/Industrial training***

**9.118** Sr Casey confirmed that children had to rise early in the morning, on a rota basis, to light the furnaces and fires. This practice stopped when central heating was installed in the School in the early 1950s.

**9.119** The children did various chores around the School and, when old enough, assisted in the laundry and bakery and on the farm. She did not accept, based on the enquiries she made, that the children engaged in heavy-duty work on the farm. The extent of their involvement would have been limited to collecting eggs, cleaning the hen-house and making butter. She conceded that the work in the laundry was hard until the 1960s, when machinery was introduced. She did not accept that children were taken out of school to assist with domestic chores.

**9.120** She added that the Congregation:

*again with hindsight would wish to acknowledge that the routine nature of the School reflected in the institutional nature of the setting was very far removed from what children would have experienced in the ordinary rhythm of a family home. It's possibly true to say as well that the routine nature was the way Sisters' lives was organised themselves so it was transposed to the Industrial School setting.*

- 9.121** Most of the complainants alleged that they had to rise early in the morning, on a rota basis, to carry in turf and coal to light the boilers. One complainant, who was in Clifden from the late 1950s and remained there until the early 1970s, added that, if the pot of water for tea was not boiled by 8am, those on duty were beaten and were put on the rota for the following week.
- 9.122** Another recurring complaint was that older girls were taken out of school to look after babies and toddlers, a claim denied by the Congregation.
- 9.123** A complainant, who was committed at the age of 10 in the late 1950s and remained there until the mid-1960s, asserted that she worked on the farm and assisted with haymaking. She also worked in the laundry from the age of 11 and washed the nuns' clothes.
- 9.124** Another complainant, sent to Clifden at the age of 12 in the early 1960s for just over a year, stated that regular chores included picking weeds and thistles from the nuns' graves, washing and polishing floors, and working in the laundry.
- 9.125** The Congregation submits that it is likely that complainants merged together the different types of chores they engaged in at different ages and failed to distinguish between chores and industrial training.
- 9.126** In Clifden, as in all girls' industrial schools, much of the maintenance and upkeep of the School was done by the residents, often in the guise of domestic training.
- 9.127**
- **Clifden was characterised by an exceptionally small staff, and it is therefore inevitable that the heavy maintenance work associated with a large institution was done by the girls themselves. Even complainants who were critical of the School conceded that it was kept spotlessly clean, and it was clear from the reports of Dr McCabe that she was impressed by the hygiene standards there. This was achieved by a disciplined round of chores and duties on the part of the girls.**
  - **It also appears that the older girls had to provide the high level of care needed by the very young children.**
  - **The distinction between using children as a labour force and providing them with industrial training was an important one. The failure to observe this distinction in Clifden sometimes led to exploitation.**

### ***Health/Hygiene***

- 9.128** A complainant described the general state of cleanliness of the children as follows:
- They were filthy, black eyes, dirty clothes or torn clothes ... the hair was sore, and the fleas used to eat right through the hair, all scabbed. The children's hair was full of scabs, full of sores, oozing and the filth and dirt and blood coming from the hair.*
- 9.129** She said she never had a toothbrush in Clifden. The children washed their teeth with bread soda. They were bathed about once a month. There were two big baths, and the children queued up naked for their baths. She found this humiliating as she started to develop. The younger children went first and, while water was added at intervals, it was filthy by the time the last of the girls took their bath.
- 9.130** A witness from the mid-1960s said that the older children checked the younger children's heads for lice and, if lice were discovered, the children were called dirty or filthy.

- 9.131** Head lice were a constant problem which was treated by putting a white powder in the child's hair and by keeping the hair short. The Resident Manager, Sr Roberta, used to check their heads for lice and children whose heads were infested were beaten.
- 9.132** Another complainant, sent to Clifden at the age of 12 in the early 1960s stated that the children had to sit down every evening and inspect each other's heads for lice.
- 9.133** A complainant remembered during the 1960s a lay worker cutting her hair in a very rough manner, leaving her with chunks of hair missing.
- 9.134** Every night, both boys and girls got undressed downstairs. They went up to bed in their underwear. She remembered feeling shy in front of the boys. They kept their nightdresses under their pillows. Each morning, they went downstairs to dress. She remembered always being cold.
- 9.135** A number of complainants stated that they received no information about menstruation or the facts of life. When their periods started, they depended on the older girls to explain what was happening. Girls left Clifden with little or no knowledge of adolescent development and the facts of life and were extremely vulnerable in the outside world. This fact should have been apparent to the Sisters who cared for them.
- 9.136** Sr Carmella gave evidence that the children kept their school clothes in the classroom, and changed before and after school. This was a practice that she had introduced, as the children used come to school late because they could not find items of clothing. They knitted their own jumpers and she helped them make their own skirts. They wore overalls over their clothes after school. The children's hair was always clean and she never observed any children with lice.
- 9.137**
- **There was undue emphasis on cleaning and polishing the premises of the Industrial School and far less emphasis on the personal cleanliness of the children.**
  - **The lack of any proper preparation for menstruation was insensitive and amounted to neglect**

### ***Bed-wetting***

- 9.138** One complainant, who was resident in Clifden for 12 years from the late 1950s, stated that children who wet the bed at night did not have sheets. A rubber cover was put over the mattress. They were not permitted to wear nightclothes and slept naked. If they wet the bed, they were beaten. Their blanket would have to be washed that day and put back on the bed semi-dry.
- 9.139** Another former resident in Clifden from the age of 10, who was committed in the late 1950s and remained there until she was discharged at the age of 16, described how children who wet the bed were called '*pissy beds*'. One of the Sisters or a lay worker would make them wrap the wet sheets around them whilst they cleaned under their bed.
- 9.140** A further witness, who was committed to Clifden for just over a year in the early 1960s at the age of 12, recalled one boy who was punished for wetting the bed by being sent out to the cows in the field with his wet sheet wrapped around him.
- 9.141**
- **Bed-wetting was a perennial problem in Clifden and there is no evidence of a more enlightened approach there. One witness gave convincing evidence of boys being left to sleep directly on rubber mattresses without sheets or pillows. This was a harsh treatment for children who wet the bed. Another gave evidence that sheets were put on these beds when the Department inspector was due. The Congregation acknowledged that it was possible that children who wet the bed were treated inappropriately.**

## Contact with families

### Documentary material

- 9.142** Clifden is located in a rural area 50 miles west of Galway City. Public transport consisted of an infrequent bus service. Children were committed from all over the country by the District Courts. Only one of the 10 complainants who gave evidence to the Investigation Committee was from County Galway. A document discovered by the Department which gives details of children in care in the mid-1970s shows that, out of the 48 children in care, only two came from Galway. In contrast, by the early 1980s the majority of children in Clifden were from County Galway and surrounding areas.
- 9.143** Given the fact that the majority of the children placed in care came from deprived backgrounds, it was very difficult for families to maintain contact with their children in Clifden. It is clear that little regard was given to the recommendation, contained in paragraph 52 of the Cussen Report, that children should be sent to industrial schools near their homes whenever practicable.
- 9.144** In the representations made by the Resident Manager to the Department for the admission of junior boys to the School in 1959, and again in 1960, she stated that the admission of young boys with their sisters would keep siblings together and so assist in the formation of familial bonds. She also stated that, in any event, girls in the School met up with their brothers in St Joseph's Industrial School, Salthill on a regular basis. The Western Health Board, who supported the proposal, reiterated these arguments in their own representations to the Department.
- 9.145** Mr Granville's Inspection Reports in the 1970s and 1980s make reference, over and over again, to the limited contact between children and their families despite 'every effort' being made. He also referred to the lack of personal effects, such as photographs etc.
- 9.146** Sr Casey acknowledged that there was little contact between children and their families, largely because they came from far-flung parts of the country. There were no restrictions imposed by the School on children visiting home, unless it was inappropriate to do so. If family did visit, they were always welcomed and, if they sent gifts or letters, these were passed on to the children.
- 9.147** She stated that children were sent to families in Galway and surrounding counties for holidays from the 1960s, in an effort to give the children some idea of what family life was like.
- 9.148** Many of the complainants have bitter memories of the absence of any effort on the part of the Sisters to maintain links with their families and, in some cases, the derogatory manner in which the Sisters referred to their families.
- 9.149** Sr Carmella was of the view that the children had little knowledge of the outside world and were insular in their outlook:
- They hadn't an idea what family life was like. I remember a child asking me – she saw an ad in the paper for Stork margarine, it was a family sitting around the table and she said to me, "is that what a family is like?" They hadn't a clue. They hadn't an idea what a dwelling house was like. They were used to big rooms and big utensils and everything big. They just didn't have a clue, until they went out on holidays later on.*
- 9.150** She found her years teaching the industrial school children very fulfilling: *'I felt that I was taking the place of their parents and the majority of them could confide in me'.*
- 9.151** She agreed that there were some children who should never have been in the School and would have been better off at home. The system had no means of catering for children who required extra care and attention, or bright children whose talents could have been fostered.

- 9.152** • **The geographical location of Clifden made it almost impossible for children to remain in contact with family.**

### ***Preparation for departure/aftercare***

- 9.153** Mr Granville made a number of references in his inspection reports to the deficiency in aftercare facilities and the lack of co-ordination of such facilities between the School and the Health Board.
- 9.154** Sr Margaret Casey said that the children received industrial training, which consisted of tuition in crafts, needlework, knitting, laundry, housekeeping, gardening, minding young children and serving in the parlour: *'this was seen as industrial training and as an effort to prepare them for life after the industrial school and for future employment'*. She accepted that, until 1969, the primary career envisaged for the children was a career in domestic service.
- 9.155** Former residents complained that they were not given any advance notice that they were due to leave the Institution.
- 9.156** One witness, a resident in Clifden during the late 1950s and 1960s, stated that she was told the morning she left that she would be leaving Clifden that day. The nuns had organised a job for her in the laundry of a hospital in Galway.
- 9.157** Another witness, who spent over five years in Clifden from the late 1950s when she was 10 years old, is adamant that she left the Institution, months after her sixteenth birthday, contrary to certain Department and Sisters of Mercy records. However, the Department pupil file for this witness appears to substantiate her claim. The file shows that her height and weight were measured approximately three months after her sixteenth birthday. She confronted a Sister about this at the time who responded, *'You are nothing but a pauper'*. When she did eventually leave, she was not given advance notice.
- 9.158** The positive witness proposed by the Congregation who gave evidence also spoke about being retained after her sixteenth birthday, and stated that Sr Roberta decided when girls could leave and that her word was law.

### **Emotional abuse**

- 9.159** Sr Margaret Casey conceded:
- at the very least that the individual needs of the child could not be addressed, that each child's potential could not be known or realised so we do accept that some children experienced life there as being harsh and also impersonal, in fact even abusive. For this we are deeply sorry.*
- 9.160** She puts this down in part to the fact that the child-staff ratio was very high until the 1970s, and in part to the lack of training for staff in childcare.
- 9.161** She was asked whether there was, in effect, an embargo on showing affection. Sr Casey accepted that Sisters were discouraged from showing affection to the children, and said that this had to be viewed in the context of the vows taken by the Sisters when entering religious life. Rather than showing love and affection to one person, you measured out the same degree of affection to everyone.
- 9.162** Many of the complainants alleged that Sisters and a lay worker often made disparaging remarks regarding their families and treated them disrespectfully if they came to visit.



- 9.163** Sr Olivia accepted that, particularly during her early years in Clifden, it was a cold, bleak place with little room to show love or affection to the children.
- 9.164** Sr Carmella stated that the children craved affection, which they sought from the Sisters. They were not chosen as pets by the Sisters, rather they would attach themselves to a particular Sister. However, there was, in effect, a prohibition on showing affection to the children, and the Sisters were encouraged to maintain their distance.
- 9.165** The two national schools merged in 1969 and the children from the Industrial School joined the local children in Scoil Mhuire. Sr Carmella explained:
- they found it very hard to mix in the beginning, they felt very insecure the first year because they didn't seem to belong anywhere. They were very secure down with us and how they were like thrown in with the town's children and I felt they were lost the first year.*
- 9.166** Prior to this, they did not mix at all with the people from the locality, as the Resident Manager did not allow it.
- 9.167** This respondent stated that many of the Sisters had good relationships with the children and there was a fair amount of interaction between the Sisters in the convent and the children. When asked to elaborate on this interaction, however, she stated that the children were often up in the convent cleaning.
- 9.168** Sr Elana, who taught in Scoil Mhuire from the late 1950s, confirmed that the convent, where she resided, was on the same grounds as the Industrial School, although the Sisters in the convent had little contact with the children. It was a relatively large community, with approximately 30 Sisters in the late 1960s. They were not encouraged to interact with the children from the Industrial School.
- 9.169** Two former residents of Clifden had positive memories of small acts of kindness to them by some nuns, even though they sometimes occurred in circumstances where other nuns had been particularly cruel.
- 9.170** A witness, who was sent to Clifden at the age of 10 in the late 1950s and remained there until the mid-1960s, recalled good memories of one respondent, Sr Carmella. She remembered being hit by her on only one occasion. This Sister was kind to the children and the witness felt that she could talk to her. She alleged that this Sister gave her white socks to wear in order to cover bruises on her legs that she had sustained at the hands of Sr Veronica. The Congregation's Submission following the Phase III hearings rebuts the accusation that Sr Carmella was somehow complicit in physical abuse.
- 9.171** The witness described another Sister, who worked on the farm, as a lovely nun. She would allow the children to eat the left-over food from the convent, which had been destined for the pigs.
- 9.172** At Christmas time, the children would receive a handkerchief, comb or hair slide in a brown paper bag.
- 9.173** They were taught singing and dancing and performed at feiseanna.
- 9.174** Another complainant, who was committed to Clifden for just over a year in the early 1960s when she was 12 years old, recalled one particular Sister who was kind: *'When Sister Veronica beat us up, or Sister Roberta, and we would be sore or crying she would always put her hand on your shoulder and tell you not to cry, that everything would be okay. But everything wasn't okay down there. Everything was bad'.*

- 9.175 The witness also named one Sister who was fine, because she did not beat the children.
- 9.176 Her abiding positive memory of Clifden is spending time with the animals on the farm.
- 9.177 **The recollection of complainants, that Clifden was a cold, cheerless environment with little emotional contact from the Sisters who worked there, is borne out by the evidence of the Sisters themselves.**
- 9.178 The Congregation proposed that evidence should be heard from a former resident, Mary,<sup>15</sup> who had positive memories of the Institution.
- 9.179 In addition, in its written Submissions to the Commission, the Congregation asked the Investigation Committee to take account of the evidence of one of the complainants, who was committed to Clifden at the age of eight in 1966 and remained there for a year and a half, and who it asserts was a reliable witness and ‘showed balance and emotional closure or maturity in the way he described life in the school’.

### **Congregation’s witness**

- 9.180 Mary was committed to Clifden when she was two years old, in the late 1940s, and remained there until the mid-1960s.
- 9.181 She was part of a group of children known as the ‘specials’. These were children who were considered delicate and they were given a special supplementary diet. Every day at 11am, they were taken out of school and given an egg-flip and cod liver oil. As she got older, she was chosen to run errands down in the village.
- 9.182 She accepted that at times some children were hungry. For breakfast, they had two slices of buttered bread with tea. At lunchtime, they had potatoes and vegetables. During school term, they had porridge every day at 3pm in the back yard. They had bread with butter and jam for supper. On Sunday, they had bacon and cabbage. They had dessert three times a week. They always used delph and cutlery and never ate with their hands, as was alleged by one complainant.
- 9.183 The witness did not accept that children ate food from the pigs’ buckets as a regular occurrence. Once or twice a year, when nuns were finally professed, the children were given food left over from the visitors:
- you know, they would bring the food that was left over from all their visitors, we would have to – there would be a few people who would have to carry it out, so they would bring it down the walk and they would put it down and we would all go into it. But that was not something that was daily or weekly or thing, absolutely, that's not true.*
- 9.184 She said that they occasionally stole bread from the bakery, but this was more out of devilment than hunger. Sr Gina<sup>16</sup> supervised meals, and there was no bullying over food at mealtimes:
- Clifden was very regimented and everything had to be done in order, because don't forget there was so many of us.*
- 9.185 The building was kept immaculately and fires burned throughout the day. It was very cold at night, however, after the fires went out.

<sup>15</sup> This is a pseudonym

<sup>16</sup> This is a pseudonym.

**9.186** The Resident Manager always ensured that they were well dressed from head to toe. None of the children went barefoot. They were always made to feel that they were as good as anybody else. The witness described her as harsh, strict and dedicated:

*Oh, yeah. Roberta had a very authoritarian voice and if she walked up to you she would say, "Hi, how are you." Her voice would cut you. We feared her to a certain extent but yet in our own way if Roberta was sick, we always lined up to go to visit her and she loved the attention that she got from us. She was very strict, don't get me wrong, and she could have been very hard at times but I think anything that she did for the children she did – in other words, if she bought stuff, she had to buy the best because she would make sure that anyone in the town couldn't be talking about, "oh, look at how badly they are dressed" or something like that. She always examined things, everything with her was very ritual, the way she did things.*

**9.187** She said that she did not like a lay worker, Ms Aherne,<sup>17</sup> whom a number of other witnesses have described as harsh. She said this worker was so eager to please the Resident Manager that she was unreasonably hard on the children.

**9.188** Mary said she was punished by the nuns, but only when she had done something wrong and never excessively. She was slapped on both hands, *'if you did wrong it was written down and before you went into your lunch she would call out the names that those were to be lined up for a beating'*. The beating consisted of being slapped on the hands with a ruler or stick. Only one particular Sister used a cane to hit children.

**9.189** She later elaborated on this theme:

*Sr Gina was the only one that used the cane. We hated the cane because the cane was much sharper. The sticks weren't bad but the cane was fierce. She would have been the only nun that would walk around with the cane.*

**9.190** The witness was asked why Sr Gina would be walking round with a cane when she was not a teacher, and she replied:

*she was supposed to be in charge of the children ... She left in [the early 1960s] ... we rejoiced over that, that was the best thing that happened.*

**9.191** Clothes were examined every Monday and if you had a hole in a garment, you were given a week to mend it. If it was not mended, you would be punished.

**9.192** Sr Roberta was feared by the children, and this witness remembered her screaming voice. She said, *'Her voice would cut you ... when Sr Roberta screamed she kind of like screamed in general, everything she said was a scream'*.

**9.193** One of the reasons for Sr Roberta's habit of screaming was that she was partly deaf. This witness said:

*In one sense you kind of feared Roberta, there is no doubt about it if someone is screaming at you all the time. But the way we would refer to Mother Roberta was, "oh, she was cracked. She's daft". But she was by no means cracked or daft ... She was like a sergeant major.*

**9.194** She added later:

*[Roberta] never liked any of the nuns to have any pets. But she had her own, don't get me wrong, she had her own.*

---

<sup>17</sup> This is a pseudonym.

- 9.195** She summed up the general attitude of the girls to Sr Roberta by saying, ‘we would say, “oh, yeah, Roberta was cruel but she was very decent”’. She added, ‘We always refer to her as being very decent and very kind’.
- 9.196** She described Sr Roberta’s deputy, Sr Veronica,<sup>18</sup> as ‘more of a nag but she got very excited because Roberta would be always screaming at her, “get this” and “do that” and everything else.’ She was a very nervous individual and always had to have things just right.
- 9.197** The relationship between Sr Roberta and the rest of the staff, particularly Sr Veronica her deputy, was always authoritarian. She said:
- Sr Veronica had to do everything the way that Roberta wanted it. Roberta would scream at her the same way she screamed at the kids. She screamed at all the nuns the same way.*
- 9.198** The witness remembered one or two of the staff with affection. She described one of the Sisters who taught her as kind, but she did not have a lot to do with the children. Another Sister who was in charge of the farm was also very nice. One of the Sisters taught music, and those involved in music travelled to different places playing with the band. A handy-man was employed to help around the School, and she described him as a comedian.
- 9.199** She said that the worst aspect of living in the School was that there were so many children in it, and it was necessarily very regimented. She felt very alone. Certain categories of children were picked upon by their peers. Those who had family and received packages were seen as better than those who did not. Those from Dublin saw themselves as more elite than those from the Midlands. Children from the Midlands were ‘the lowest of the low, because you were one of Maguires’. Mr Maguire<sup>19</sup> was the ISPCC Inspector for that area. Travellers were marginalised and she recalled that, when the more impoverished children were brought to the School, they would invariably be filthy and their hair would be crawling with lice.
- 9.200** A lay worker was in charge of ensuring that the children’s heads were free from lice. Sr Roberta examined the children’s heads every week. If lice were discovered, a lotion was put in their hair and it was combed with a fine toothcomb. In extreme cases, their heads were shaved.
- 9.201** She did not recall the nuns referring to the children’s background, apart from one Sister who made derogatory references about where the children came from.
- 9.202** Her recollection was that the nuns were not permitted to show the children any sort of physical affection. ‘No,’ she said, ‘there was absolutely no affection’. She added:
- If one of nuns put their hands around you and Mother Roberta found that out, forget it, they were in real trouble. There was no such a thing.*
- 9.203** She described a particular occasion when one nun, Sr Maria,<sup>20</sup> took pity on her:
- I remember one incident where Sr. Maria had us all lined up and she asked us all what we would really – she was asking something, you know, about ourselves what we really thought. I know I was at the end of the line and she asked me, I said, “I really want to find my mother.” She really took that very, very bad. She went out – it really bothered her. At the end, she told me to stay behind and she says, “take anything you want from this press.” She says, you know – she kind of did it like this, not a thing. But she did give me a hug and she says, “oh”, she says, “one day you will and you are a special child of God”, and something like that. But now she would make sure that nobody else saw her and that*

<sup>18</sup> This is a pseudonym.

<sup>19</sup> This is a pseudonym.

<sup>20</sup> This is a pseudonym.

*was it. So, no, they were no way affectionate, no way, no how. If you left and you came back a nun would give you a hug. But not while you were in the school, no.*

**9.204** Similarly, the older girls looking after the younger children would not dare to show their charges affection. She was asked about looking after the babies, if she would have shown affection to a little child of three or four. She replied:

*Yeah, you might, but it wasn't something you really kind of got yourself really into, that – you know. I never saw anyone really cuddling, you know. Maybe a baby trying to keep them quiet or something, but other than that you wouldn't pick a child up ...*

**9.205** She was often chosen to run errands in the village. She stated that Sr Roberta tried to take this job away from her several times, but she had struck up a good relationship with the town's people and, at her request, they would write to the Resident Manager asking her to make sure that she would be the one coming for the messages. She believed that the Resident Manager had to keep in with the town's people and so would do what they said. She added:

*she kind of resented me for that, she would say, "you old pet, get out of my sight, you old pet".*

**9.206** The witness described the education she received as standard. Everyone could read and write by the time they left the Institution. Those with learning difficulties went to one particular nun for extra tuition. She taught everything by rote. They did not receive any formal sex education and learned about the changes during puberty from each other.

**9.207** Birthdays were always celebrated and the children received gifts of sweets, fruit and a comb and ribbons for their hair. They also had toast the morning of their birthday. Christmas was also celebrated.

**9.208** She recalled regular visits from the local doctor and the Department Inspectors. When the inspector was en route from Lenaboy, the School would receive a message alerting them to the fact that she was on the way. She did not accept that bed linen and clothes were changed for the purpose of these visits. The children had to make sure that they were clean but, otherwise, very little had to be done in preparation for the visit, as the School was always in good order.

**9.209** She did not have any contact with her family while in the Institution. She stated that the nuns did not know anything about the children's background. Before allowing children home to their families on holidays, Sr Roberta would conduct inquiries to ensure that the home environment was in no way irregular. If children wished to trace their relatives after leaving the Institution, Sr Roberta supplied the address at which a copy of your birth certificate could be obtained.

**9.210** This witness was kept on in the Institution for a year and a half after her 16th birthday. It was not her choice and she had wanted to leave, but it was Sr Roberta who decided when each child could go. She was on night duty for three years before she was permitted to leave. She never received any payment for the work done in the Institution after her official discharge date.

**9.211** Her first job after leaving the Institution was as a cleaning lady in a Dublin hospital. Sr Roberta organised this job. She said the Resident Manager would try to assist any former resident who ran into difficulty after they left Clifden. In the late 1960s, the witness moved abroad to where her mother lived.

**9.212** She has always kept in contact with the nuns and feels more of a familial bond with them than with the family she discovered outside the country. She is married with children and has never gone into detail with her children about her upbringing.

**9.213** The witness has kept in contact with a number of former residents, some of whom have made efforts to induce her to submit a claim to the Redress Board alleging abuse. She did not believe, however, that her experience of Clifden was abusive. She made contact with her mother after she left Clifden and felt that her mother considered her an intrusion into her life. That was, for her, a much greater hurt and betrayal than anything that had happened to her in Clifden.

**Complainant whose evidence the Congregation regarded as reliable**

**9.214** The Sisters of Mercy described this witness, who was in Clifden for just over a year in the 1960s, as ‘essentially a reliable witness’. The complainant was born in the late 1950s in the Midlands.

**9.215** He had previously been in a residential institution in Lenaboy, County Galway and had very happy memories of his time there. He recalled spending some time at home after being discharged from Lenaboy. He had always had enough to eat but recalled his mother crying a lot. When she told her children that she had to go away for a while because she was ill, he stated, *‘we took it we were going back to Lenaboy because we liked Lenaboy, Lenaboy was very good. We were actually looking forward to it, believe it or not, it was going to be a bit of a holiday but it wasn’t you know’*. Instead, he found himself in Clifden. He found Clifden a very different environment: *‘I was cold, I was hungry, I was lonely, you know, miserable ... I thought it was a cruel regime, that’s the way I would have looked at it now, very cruel’*.

**9.216** He recalled being barefoot for what felt like a year. They were given footwear but it would go missing. He remembered his feet being cold and having a boil on his foot. It was generally the boys who were barefoot.

**9.217** He recalled another boy who was stronger and faster than the rest: *‘It was the law of the jungle’*, and he would rush down in the morning and steal food from the other children’s plates. He blamed the system which allowed this type of bullying to take place rather than the culprit who, he accepted, was also hungry. The food was not bad; there was just never enough of it. He was always hungry. They had bread with jam and a cup of tea in the morning, if another child did not get to it first. There was a bakery in the School and he remembered the smell of freshly baked bread coming from it. The children used to sneak in and steal bread from the bakery.

**9.218** He said that they did not receive any toys at Christmas, although the Christmas dinner was very good and in particular the plum pudding. The School put on a play each Christmas which was regarded as a big event. If you misbehaved, you were excluded from participating in the play.

**9.219** Amongst his chores was mopping up urine in the dormitories after children had wet the bed at night-time. His brother would clean any faeces from the beds.

**9.220** He recalled sleeping on rubber sheets, and bed linen only being provided when the Departmental inspections were due to take place. In general, there were no sheets or pillows on any of the boys’ beds, only a rubber mattress. The boys slept two to a bed.

**9.221** The witness said that one of the ISPCC inspectors forewarned the nuns of the fact that a Departmental Inspection was imminent. The witness described the change in regime when the inspector visited:

*The thing about it is what I used to remark was that when the inspectors would come, and the inspectors did come, that everything would improve for that time that they would be there. Dinners would be good, sheets on the beds, pillows, you know.*

**9.222** He went on to say, *‘You would be kind of bulling that the inspectors had left because the good times were over’*.



**9.223** He was never permitted to go home on holidays. His mother sometimes came to visit, if she could get a lift, but she was never allowed in. She had to sneak in the back entrance to visit her children and, when the nuns discovered the fact that she was there, she would run away.

**9.224** He stated that he learnt little at school because he was taught through Irish. He could not keep up with the class because he had a poor aptitude for languages. He received extra tuition from one particular Sister, Sr Magda,<sup>21</sup> who showed him great kindness. She also gave him treats of bread with butter and sugar.

**9.225** Regarding nuns who lived in the convent, he said, *'The nuns lived in a different area of the School and there was a lot of nuns that you wouldn't get to meet'*.

**9.226** He described the Resident Manager's deputy, Sr Veronica, as *'... a tyrant. Very very cruel, very tough. Very very tough...She would be the one – if there was any corporal punishment she would be the one to dish it out and Sr Roberta as well'*. He could not remember being beaten by any other nuns other than this particular Sister and the Resident Manager. He remarked that, in hindsight, the corporal punishment administered in Clifden was probably no more severe than that administered in other schools at the time. He said:

*Well, when you are being punished, it is like everything else, you will always take it that no one has ever been punished as hard as you, it is human nature... . The corporal punishment, when you look back on it now, probably was no different than other schools. It was just the hunger and the cold.*

**9.227** He was transferred to the Christian Brothers' Industrial School in Salthill in the late 1960s. He was fed and treated better in Salthill. He recalled:

*as tough and all as Salthill was we got well fed and treated that good bit better really in Salthill ... There was a difference, believe it or not, between Clifden and Salthill. A good difference, a major difference.*

**9.228** Of the three institutions he spent time in, Clifden was the toughest, mainly because of the cold and hunger. In particular, he recalled being treated with kindness in Lenaboy:

*But all I can remember from [there] was the kindness. They were very, very kind to us ... The kindness, they were very, very kind [there]. When we were being taken out of [there] to go home I actually missed it.*

**9.229** He did not accept that his experience in Clifden had impacted adversely upon his life in any great way: *'Things like that you just try to bury it, bury it in the back of your mind and go forward you know'*. He is now a tradesman and is married with children.

**9.230** Among the points emerging from these witnesses are:

- **Both spoke of the inadequacy of the diet in terms of quality and quantity and both spoke of being hungry. Although one witness said that there was no bullying at meal times, the other was quite clear that this did occur and it meant that smaller, weaker children went without.**
- **Both described a different member of the religious staff as being cruel, as well as a lay worker, and one of these witnesses identified the regime as harsh and cruel. In particular, the positive witness's description of the Resident Manager was indicative of a person unsuited to caring for children.**
- **One of the witnesses said that the Sisters were prohibited from any display of physical affection, which she identified as a hardship for the nuns themselves.**

---

<sup>21</sup> This is a pseudonym.

Moreover, she learnt from the nuns to keep a distance and not cuddle the younger children placed in her care. There can be no doubt that the constant rejection of very vulnerable children instinctively seeking this kind of reassurance and affection would have had an extremely damaging effect on them. It seems extraordinary that a Congregation of nuns who had been engaged in childcare for over 100 years would have continued this attitude towards the children in their care when they must have seen the damage it was doing. It would seem that the observance of the discipline of the Congregation was given priority over the interests of the children. The banishment of the expression of affection may have made the Sisters appear to be acting fairly, by making them treat all children in the same way, but it also made them detached and distant, and at worst cold and cruel.

- Both witnesses confirmed what a number of complainants have said about this and other institutions, that the authorities were warned when an Inspector from the Department of Education was coming, and clothes, bedding and food were improved for the occasion. These two witnesses differed as to the amount of preparation that was made, but it is clear that the preparations ensured that the inspectors did not get an accurate picture of the Institution during these inspections.
- The positive witness, Mary in particular spoke of there being ‘*elite*’ groups, as well as marginalised children such as Travellers. She recalled that the Resident Manager had pets. Religious and lay staff members denigrated the children’s background. These facts indicate that, whilst, for some, Clifden may not have been a bad place to be, for others it was harsh and abusive.
- The positive witness was detained for 18 months after her discharge date, to go on working in the Institution. She said that she did not want to stay and asked to be let out, but she was clearly a reliable and responsible young person and was detained at the will of the Resident Manager. Although this witness does not make a complaint about being kept on, it was clear exploitation and a failure to consider the best interests of the child.
- One of these witnesses was introduced by the Congregation as a positive witness. She balanced her criticisms of the regime by testifying that the good the Sisters did outweighed their shortcomings, but her evidence nevertheless contained quite severe criticisms and acquires increased importance because she was advanced by the Congregation as a positive witness.

## **General conclusions**

- 9.231**
1. Clifden was isolated and inaccessible for an industrial school. Contact with families was nearly impossible because of its location. Many children came from distant parts of the country, contrary to an important Cussen Report recommendation that children be sent to schools near their families.
  2. Sr Roberta was Resident Manager for 27 years and established a strict, authoritarian and cold regime unsuitable for caring for children. During her administration, the School was also very understaffed.
  3. Corporal punishment was over-used as a first option for enforcing discipline and was not restricted to cases of serious misbehaviour.
  4. Children were institutionalised by the time they left, particularly those who were committed from a young age. They had no concept of normal family life. They were not shown love or affection by the nuns, and only had contact with the Sisters who worked in the convent (and Scoil Mhuire after 1969). The Sisters in the convent made

an appearance once a year at the Christmas concert, but they were discouraged from having any other contact with the children who lived only yards away.

5. Mr Graham Granville noted as late as the 1970s that the children had very few visible reminders of home such as family photographs, which added to the isolation and lack of identity that they felt after leaving the Institution.
6. The Congregation accepts that the nuns' vows dictated that they led a regimented lifestyle, which was reflected in the strictly controlled manner in which the children were brought up and in the absence of any demonstration of affection by the nuns.
7. The standard of education was low and there was little emphasis on academic achievement, which reflected the low aspirations the Sisters had for the children as regards future careers.
8. The children were poorly prepared for leaving the Institution and there were no aspirations for them beyond careers in domestic service. There was no preparation for departure. Many of the children had no idea what lay ahead when they were sent off to jobs in towns and cities.

## Appendix 1

# Report by Mr Ciaran Fahy (19<sup>th</sup> January 2006)

---

### 1.0 Introduction

The purpose of this report is to describe the physical surroundings of St Joseph's Industrial School, Clifden with particular reference to the buildings. It is based on research carried out by Mr Ciaran Fahy during the course of which all of the relevant documentation in the possession of the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse was examined. On 12<sup>th</sup> September 2005, Mr Fahy visited the Industrial School in Clifden in the company of the Senior Executive Engineer with Galway County Council to examine the Industrial School building and also to meet with the Manager of the nearby Elmtree Centre. Subsequent to this, there was a meeting with one of the Sisters (who had taught in the school in the mid-1960s) at the Sisters of Mercy premises in Galway.

This report is to be read in conjunction with drawings and photographs as follows:

— **Drawings**

Two drawings provided by the Sisters of Mercy were prepared by Scott Tallon Walker, Architects for the Sisters in 2001, and shows a site map and a ground floor plan. The 4 photographs were similarly provided.

### 2.0 Background

#### 2.1 Location

St Joseph's Industrial School, Clifden was certified in July 1872 and was closed down in 1984. It was located at the north eastern edge of Clifden due north of the road from Galway and the train station. It was located on higher ground with the front elevation of the building facing due south over the town.

In drawing 1, the small building slightly forward of the Industrial School and to the right of it is the laundry which apparently was built about the same time. It should be noted there is a hospital further to the east of the Industrial School and obviously this was not in position in 1898.

#### 2.2 Foundation

There is some uncertainty about when exactly the Industrial School was built. The County Council who now have possession of the building had a report prepared by the National Building Agency in June 2005. This report suggests the Industrial School was purpose built in 1870, opened in 1871 and certified in July 1872. This report then goes on to say: 'an increase in the number of children attending the school required an increase in the size of the building. In 1881 the Industrial School building was extended to the west creating an additional wing on the side of the building'.

Some details have also been provided by the Sisters of Mercy which show they moved to Clifden from Galway when invited to do so by the local parish priest and established a convent on 16<sup>th</sup> July 1855. It appears that in about 1859, the Sisters became involved in caring for orphaned

Catholic children using a premises rented from the Franciscan Brothers. The details from the Sisters of Mercy suggest that the Industrial School was constructed in 1862 near the convent and apparently was built on eight acres (about 3 hectares) of land.

### **2.3 Subsequent History**

It is clear that subsequent to its initial construction, the Industrial School in Clifden was extended on a number of occasions. The NBA Report says that St Joseph's Roman Catholic Church alongside it was built in 1879 and the spire was added in 1898. This report concludes that the laundry was built as part of the initial construction and as regards the Industrial School itself, it suggests extensions were carried out as follows:

- 1871 the building was extended to the west towards the convent or the Church.
- Some time after 1898 the building was extended to the east apparently adding five bays, apparently in an attempt to restore the original symmetry by matching the two central projecting bays.
- About 1932, it is believed that further modifications were made since there is reference in the Irish Builder of July 1932 to an Invitation to Tender for alterations and additions, including a new wing, bake house, etc. The NBA believe that the windows in the western and probably the eastern end of the building were altered at that time and it also appears that four classrooms were incorporated in the building.

The information from the Sisters of Mercy suggests that additions and alterations were carried out as follows:

- 1873, it seems an additional wing was built together with baths and water closets and a new boundary was erected at a total cost of £3,588.
- 1880, a new school room and dormitory was provided at a cost of £528.
- 1886, it appears the limit of the school was increased to 80 and about that time there were new additions consisting of a kitchen, pantry, dairy, lavatory and infirmary. The Sisters of Mercy suggest that this was the last significant extension to the school.
- 1911, apparently the school rooms and dormitories at that time were heated by hot water pipes and open fireplaces. It is not known if this simply is a recording of fact or whether this was work carried out at that time.
- 1933, four classrooms were built.

Details from the Sisters of Mercy suggest that the school was originally certified in 1872 for 25 pupils and this was increased to 80 in 1886. This limit was further extended to 100 in 1892, 120 in 1944 and 140 in 1960. Details from the Sisters of Mercy suggest that the numbers of children in the school ranged between 100 and 127 between 1935 and 1965 increasing in line with the certified limit.

The Sisters of Mercy were based in the convent alongside the Industrial School and in addition to this they were also involved in running the girls' primary school, apparently located behind the convent further up the hill. They also ran a girls' secondary school and the hospital which is located to the east of the Industrial School. It appears they operated a farm close to the Industrial School with the farmyard located just to the east of the Industrial School and the laundry. There is little or no information in relation to this and it is suggested that the farm extended to approximately 12 hectares (about 30 acres) and it apparently closed down in 1969. It appears the Sisters of Mercy ran a commercial laundry in this building alongside the Industrial School but this apparently had ceased as a commercial laundry by 1940 and subsequent to this, it was used only for the Industrial School and also for the nuns in the convent.

The Industrial School closed in 1984. It appears the building was disused for a number of years before a portion of it was used as a Day Centre by the Clifden Support Centre. The convent itself closed on 5<sup>th</sup> July 2001. Subsequent to this that building was extensively extended to the rear and is now used as a home for the elderly.

## 3.0 Details

### 3.1 General

The site is shown in the Scott Tallon Walker drawing based on a survey carried out in October 2001, just after the convent closed. The first of the drawings show the site generally at a scale of 1:200, while the later drawings shows the ground floor at a scale of 1:100. The drawings have obviously been reduced for incorporating in this report and as such while they are to scale they are no longer to the scale referred to on the drawings.

The first drawing shows the location of the convent together with the Industrial School and the laundry located just to the right of it. Broadly speaking, the Industrial School is rectangular in shape incorporating four projections on the southern façade while at the rear, there is a small courtyard enclosed towards the right hand side of the drawing.

### 3.2 Farm

Little or no information is available as regards the farm associated with the Industrial School. During the meeting with the Sister who had taught in the school, she said she felt the farm was approximately 30 acres. She said the nuns had a supply of milk, butter and eggs from the farm and in addition they kept pigs and turkeys. There was also a glasshouse for tomatoes located behind or to the north of the convent and equally, there was a farmyard located to the east of the laundry which is now occupied by the Western Health Board as shown in the Scott Tallon Walker layout drawing.

She indicated that the farm closed in 1969.

### 3.3 Main Building

The building is a two storey although there was a small basement at the eastern end which in later years at least contained a boiler. Broadly speaking, the dormitories and sleeping accommodation together with bathrooms were located at first floor level. The ground floor contained the classrooms, recreation area, dining and cooking facilities. Finally, it should be noted that there was a single storey bakery located to the right rear at the main block as shown in the Scott Tallon Walker drawing no. 2, thus forming a small enclosed courtyard at the eastern end of the building.

The first floor of the building contained five dormitories together with two main bathrooms, an infirmary as well as some other bedrooms and stores. In addition, a 1944 drawing shows the nun's bedroom immediately behind the Sacred Heart dormitory as the Resident Manager's bedroom. The two guest bedrooms shown in front of the bakery behind Our Lady of Lourdes' dormitory were apparently used by staff as well as visitors calling to the school.

The details provided in 1944 refer to the first floor containing five dormitories together with the infirmary and four staff bedrooms. In each case the height of the dormitories was 4.6m and they all had electric light and central heating. Details of the individual dormitories are given below:

St Catherine's	14.0 x 6.2m	39 children
St Anne's	10.5 x 6.2m	21 children



St Joseph's	10.5 x 6.2m	20 children
Sacred Heart	11.5 x 6.3m	20 children
Lady of Lourdes	7.8 x 5.9m	14 children
Infirmery	8.1 x 4.3m	12 children

The 1944 details also speak of the lavatories or bathrooms on the first floor and identify these as 'black' and 'white'. Black is described as having 70 wash hand basins and one slop hopper while the white bathroom was fitted with 44 wash hand basins and one slop hopper. The 1944 report also speaks of a bath, two WCs and one wash hand basin for the staff on the upper floor. There appear to have been no toilet facilities for the girls on the first floor although, there is reference to a range of six toilets at ground floor with a further nine toilets being located outside the school some 20 to 25m from it.

The ground floor layout is shown in the Scott Tallon Walker drawing no. 2 with the use of individual rooms marked in. The drawing clearly shows the arrangement of the bakery at the north eastern corner of the building thus forming a small internal courtyard. The 1944 details describe four classrooms on this level together with a sewing room, a dining hall, kitchens, pantries, bathroom, storerooms and a nursery. Six WCs at the ground floor level, presumably for the use of the children while there is also reference to a bathroom containing three baths and one wash hand basin.

The position of the two kitchens is shown in the Scott Tallon Walker drawing towards the rear of the building. To the left of this is what is described as the domestic economy room, which was also a kitchen but was used more for the teaching of cooking and each of these two kitchens was provided with a range, while there were obviously pantry and scullery facilities alongside them.

The location of the bakery is unchanged from 1944 and is as shown in the Scott Tallon Walker drawing. To the left of this, what is shown as the cloakroom appears to have been the bathroom with the three baths located there. The boot store beside these is shown in some of the other details as a flour store but it is also described as a wardrobe room.

The four classrooms were at the eastern end of the building with three of these being marked as such in the Scott Tallon Walker drawing. The remedial room appears also to have served as an office and for storage to some extent with three main classrooms being towards the front of the building.

The purpose of the room shown as the recreational hall is not entirely clear. On the 1944 sketch it seems to be shown as a sewing room and this would be consistent with some dimensions given at that time. The nursery appears to have been located at the north western corner of the building where the sitting room is shown on the Scott Tallon Walker drawing. Equally, the dining room seems to have been located towards the front of the building just to one side of the entrance hallway and the 2001 partition appears to have been simply added after the school was closed. There appears to have been a second dining room on the front corner of the building to the left of this.

Some dimensions were provided in 1944 as set out below:

- Classroom No 1 (nearest to the recreational hall)  
6.4m x 5.9m x 3.7m high. 35 pupils.
- Classroom No 2 (on the other side of the accordion partition)  
6.4m x 5.6m x 3.7m high. 30 pupils.
- Classroom No 3 (corner room)  
7.8m x 5.9m x 3.7m high. 35 pupils.
- Classroom No 4 (remedial room)  
6.1m x 3.4m x 3.0m high. 20 pupils.

- Nursery  
6.1m x 6.1m x 4.0m high. There is a note to the effect '20 infants usually occupy this room'.
- Sewing Room  
7.5m x 6.2m x 3.7m high. The room apparently accommodated 40 children.
- Recreational Hall  
44.6m x 4.1m x 4.6m high. This is described as being capable of being used by 120 children at one time.

The main entrance into the building appears to have been at the projection on the front of the building shown in the centre of photograph no. 1 of the 2001 photographs taken by Scott Tallon Walker. This led directly to the main stairs serving ground and first floor level and the ground floor level is shown in photographs 38, 39 and 42. To the left of this the dining room is shown in photographs 33 and 35 and the partition in this room shown in photograph no. 33 seems to have been a later addition after the school was closed. The dining room at the corner is shown in photographs 34 and 37 with the first of these showing an internal porch at the entrance into the building nearest the convent. Photograph no. 36 was taken in the nursery behind, while photographs 57 and 59 were taken in the storeroom and utility room on the Scott Tallon Walker drawing. It appears that these were used at certain points as a pantry and also as an office. Photograph 54, apparently was taken in the kitchen used to teach domestic economy and shows the position of the range while photograph no. 60, was taken in the other kitchen and shows the corresponding range. Photograph 58 was also taken within the same kitchen area while photographs 50 and 51 were taken in the scullery behind it.

Photographs 52 and 53 were taken in what is described as a cloakroom but which also served as a bathroom, while photograph no. 49 was taken outside the boot room and photographs 47 and 48 show the stairs nearby which obviously provided secondary access between the first and ground floor. Photographs 23, 24 and 25 were taken within the courtyard while photograph no. 27 shows the bakery taken from the courtyard. Photograph no. 44 was taken within the corner classroom, while photograph no. 41 was taken in the double classroom alongside looking into the recreational hall. Finally, photographs 43, 45 and 46 were all taken within the recreational hall.

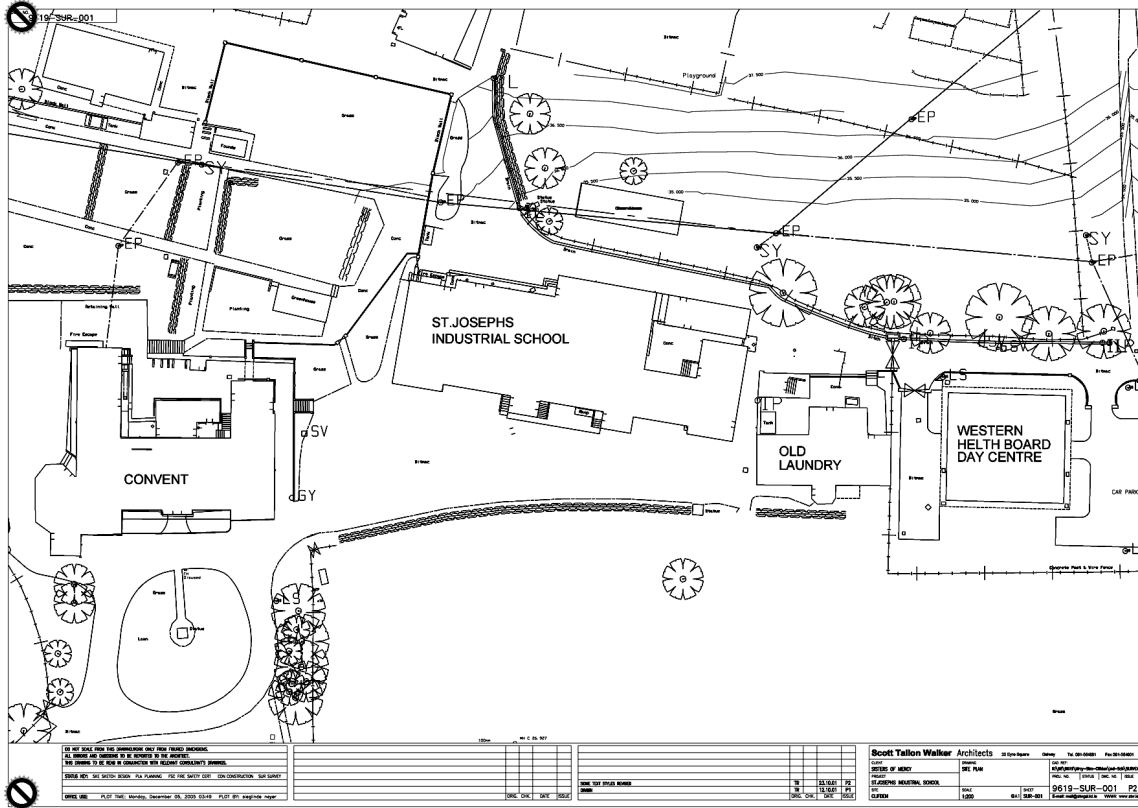
### **3.4 Laundry**

The laundry is shown in the recent photographs nos. 3, 15 and 16 and is positioned generally alongside the main building and shown in the Scott Tallon Walker drawing no. 1. It is broadly rectangular in shape and two storey. The stairs within the building have been removed and it is now only used for storage but there is still some old laundry equipment within the building and structurally it appears to be in reasonable condition.

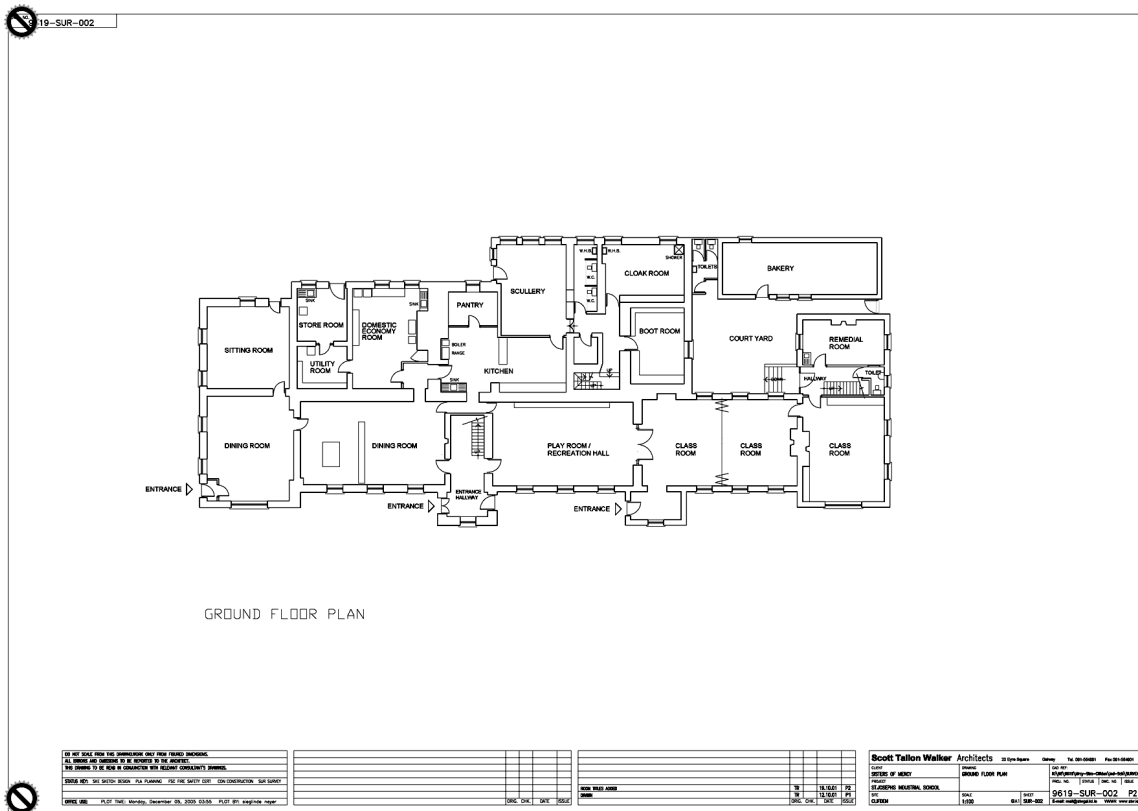
### **3.5 Services**

There seems to have been a form of central heating in the school going back to 1911 and in 1944, it is clear the building was provided with central heating and electric light throughout. The central heating was fired using turf and coke and in winter it operated from 6.30 a.m. until 9.00 p.m. It appears each room was also fitted with a fireplace but fires were only lit in the kitchens and the sewing room at ground floor level.

# 2001 Drawing 1



# 2001 Drawing 2



2001 Photographs



ST.JOSEPHS INDUSTRIAL SCHOOL, CLIFDEN, CO. GALWAY.



ST.JOSEPHS INDUSTRIAL SCHOOL, CLIFDEN, CO. GALWAY.





