

Chapter 8

Letterfrack Industrial School (‘Letterfrack’), 1885–1974

Introduction

Establishment of Letterfrack

- 8.01** Letterfrack is a village situated in Connemara, Co Galway, more than 84 kilometres from Galway city. A wealthy Quaker couple moved to Letterfrack from England in 1849 and bought a large tract of land that they developed. Amongst the various improvements they made were the construction of a large residence and a school for the children from the locality. In 1884 the property was sold to the Archbishop of Tuam, Dr John McEvilly, who applied the proceeds of a legacy bequeathed for charitable purposes.
- 8.02** The Archbishop wrote to the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, Earl Spencer, shortly after the purchase, suggesting that the property was ‘admirably suited for a boys’ industrial school so sadly needed in that district’.
- 8.03** The Lord Lieutenant sought advice from his officials on the matter and the feedback was universally against the proposal. The general view can be summed up in the following extract from a memorandum from one of his officials:
- In a wild remote district like Letterfrack it is very improbable that there would be any genuine cases for committal, the children there do not beg. There is no one to beg from. They all have settled places of abode – they live with their parents; are not found wandering, and though no doubt very poor, are not destitute: they do not frequent the company of thieves – there are no thieves in districts like Letterfrack in Ireland – the people are very poor but very honest.
- 8.04** Furthermore, the Lord Lieutenant was advised that the number of national schools in the area amply provided for the educational needs of the children.
- 8.05** Despite support from the Inspector of Industrial Schools, Sir John Lentaigne, the Archbishop’s application for the establishment of an industrial school in Letterfrack was refused by the Lord Lieutenant.
- 8.06** However, the Archbishop was not to be dissuaded and he continued to lobby the Lord Lieutenant. His efforts eventually bore fruit, and a letter from the Vice Regal Lodge dated 11th August 1885 stated:
- There are no doubt technical objections to the establishment of an Industrial School at Letterfrack: but after reading the papers through carefully I am satisfied that the general and moral reasons far outweigh the objections.

- 8.07** On 14th November 1885 the Chief Secretary's Office confirmed its sanction for the establishment of an industrial school in Letterfrack certified for the reception of 75 boys to open 'so soon after the 1st April next as the promoters of the school are in a position to satisfy the Inspector that the buildings intended for the purpose are fit for the reception of children within the meaning of the Industrial School Act'. With Sir John Lentaigne already on board, this latter stipulation did not prove to be a stumbling block.
- 8.08** The Archbishop entered into negotiations with the Christian Brothers regarding the management of the School. There were fears that the low certification limit would discourage the Brothers from agreeing to run the School. Incentives were offered to enhance the proposal. A lease of the lands and premises was drawn up for a term of 999 years subject to an annual rent of £82.10s and included 'about 45 statute acres of good land in the village of Letterfrack on which the new mansion house, extensive farm buildings, and about 12 or 14 well constructed cottages, large schools, police barracks and dispensary now stand'. A sizeable sum of money had been expended on modernising the buildings, and the new Manager of the School would also be given extensive grazing rights on adjoining land. Funds were also made available from the Archbishop to fund the purchase of furniture, trades appliances and the construction of workshops.
- 8.09** The Christian Brothers agreed to manage the Institution, and extensive plans were made to develop the property into an industrial school. Included in their plans was the purchase of the adjacent land over which the Archbishop had promised grazing rights. The Government was concerned when it became aware of these plans and an internal memorandum dated 24th March 1886 stated that Sir Lentaigne should be officially notified that 'the Government does not see its way to any future extension to the numbers in the Letterfrack School' and that the Brothers should therefore be discouraged from expending large sums of money on the School.
- 8.10** Whether or not these concerns were communicated to the Christian Brothers, the proposed developments proceeded. The Chief Secretary signed the certificate for St Joseph's Industrial School for the reception of 75 boys on 1st April 1886. Building and refurbishment of the Institution was completed in August 1887, and the school opened its doors on 12th October 1887.
- 8.11** In March 1889 the Resident Manager, Br Flood, applied for an increase in the certified number, and any unease the Government previously had regarding the expansion of the School seemed to have dissipated over the intervening three years, as a revised certificate was granted on 1st April 1889 doubling the certified number to 150.
- 8.12** Once again, in 1895, an application was made for an increase in numbers. Br Slattery, the Manager, wrote in support of his application 'the main building, shops and other accessories were erected to accommodate 200 children to meet the requirements of this large populous district – the poorest in all Ireland'. He was supported in his application by B. McAndrew, P.P., who also wrote to the Chief Secretary:
- The outlay on the Building for 200 boys, partly made with borrowed money, has much crippled the resources of the Brothers, as they have not as yet been allowed the full number for which they provided accommodation, and which would, in some measure, recoup them.
- 8.13** He went on to say that:
- the restriction of the number to just 150, bears no adequate proportion to the extent and intensity of the chronic destitution that prevails throughout Connemara. Surely, it will be a matter of great gratification and grateful remembrance if one of your first public acts of well-doing amongst us, will secure the blessing of a safe and salutary home for 50 more of the destitute little ones in the poorest part of Ireland.

- 8.14** The Chief Secretary was not willing to oblige, and refused to increase the certified number.
- 8.15** In November 1912 the accommodation limit was increased to 190, with the certified number remaining at 150 boys. This latter figure was increased in July 1931 to 165, with the accommodation limit remaining at 190.
- 8.16** What is particularly noteworthy about the inception of Letterfrack Industrial School is that, despite the prevailing view that, first, there was no demand for an industrial school in this part of the country and, secondly, that the location was entirely unsuitable, the Archbishop brought sufficient pressure to bear that these persuasive grounds for objection were reduced to mere technical difficulties. However, the reasons against establishing an industrial school in Letterfrack haunted the School throughout its life and eventually contributed to its closure in 1974.
- 8.17** St Joseph's Industrial School, like all other residential schools of that time, provided care for 'large numbers of children living together'. The main building was an inverted L-shaped structure. The ground floor housed the classrooms, the boys' dining room, their kitchen, scullery, laundry and bathroom. There were two large dormitories for the boys on the first floor, each holding at least 80 beds. There was a third dormitory for a brief period when numbers were particularly high. By the 1960s, with falling numbers, only one dormitory was utilised. The Brothers lived in a separate monastery – the original manor house – beside the School.

Photographs and Plan of Letterfrack

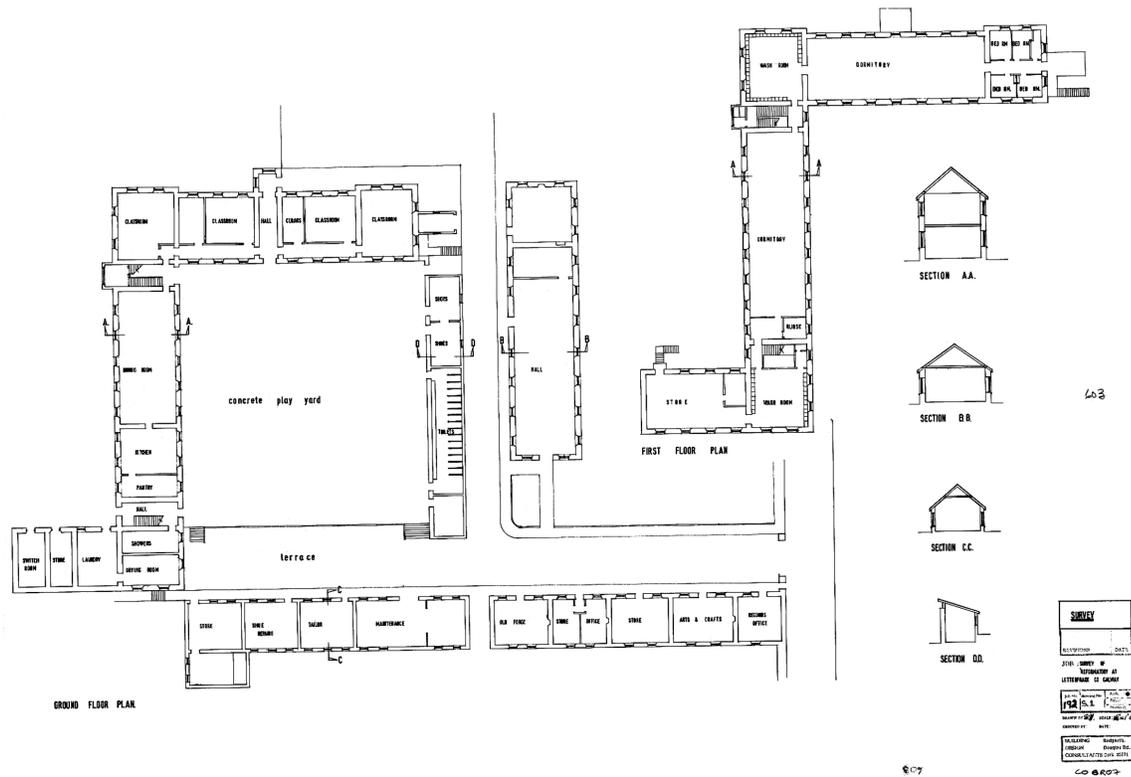
- 8.18** The following photographs and plan of Letterfrack have been made available to the Committee:



Source: Lawrence Collection, National Photographic Archive, Temple Bar, Dublin (taken between 1870 and 1914).



Source: Congregation of Christian Brothers (taken in the early 1970s).



Source: Congregation of Christian Brothers (1972)

8.19 The physical location of Letterfrack in remote Connemara created a very real sense of isolation, felt by both the boys and the Brothers in the School. The surrounding region could not supply the number of boys needed for the School, and most of the children sent there came from many miles away. This created obvious difficulties for families wishing to visit their children.

8.20 The isolated environment in Letterfrack nurtured an institutionalised culture separate from society and other institutions. It also led to another unforeseen problem: those people who chose to abuse boys physically and sexually were able to do so for longer periods of time, because they could escape detection and punishment by reason of the isolated environment in which they operated. These matters will be dealt with in detail in the sections that follow.

Management and administration

8.21 2,819 boys passed through the doors of Letterfrack from its opening in 1887 to its closure in 1974. Between 1940 and 1974, 1,356 boys were resident there. This figure excludes voluntary admissions which totalled 52 between 1935 and 1954. The following table shows the number of children detained for each year between 1937 and 1973:

Year	Number of children under detention		Year	Number of children under detention
1937	125		1955	91
1938	130		1956	86
1939	122		1957	101
1940	140		1958	98
1941	160		1959	108
1942	171		1960	111
1943	150		1961	115
1944	159		1962	128
1945	168		1963	112
1946	166		1964	114
1947	151		1965	100
1948	142		1966	111
1949	154		1967	129
1950	184		1968	111
1951	157		1969	93
1952	158		1970–71	101
1953	144		1971–72	73
1954	147		1972–73	41

8.22 From the outset, there was pressure to increase the certified numbers of boys in Letterfrack in order to make it a financially viable project. The Institution was large and the Brothers needed the maximum number of boys in residence. As noted above, the certified number was very quickly doubled, from the original certified limit of 75 in 1886, to 150 in 1889. The School could officially accommodate 190 from 1912.

8.23 The authorities struggled to meet this number throughout the years. Even during the emergency years of World War II, numbers did not reach the accommodation limit. There was an increase in numbers during these years in all industrial schools, largely due to the more difficult social conditions, combined with a policy of removing potentially problematic children from the streets.

8.24 The Christian Brothers stated in their Opening Statement to the Commission:

At local level the day to day management of Letterfrack institution, in accordance with the Rules and Regulations for Industrial Schools was the responsibility of the Resident Manager. The Resident Manager was appointed by the Irish Provincial Council up to 1956 and by the Provincial Council of St. Mary's Province, Ireland from 1956–1974. The period

1938 to 1974 saw nine Resident Managers in Letterfrack, the terms of office ranging from one to six years with an average term of office of five years. During the relevant period each Resident Manager had between seven and ten Brothers under his control. Between 3 and 5 Brothers were on the teaching staff and there was a Brother who acted as bursar, an office Brother, a kitchen Brother and a Brother who worked on the farm. For most of the relevant period there were between fourteen and twenty lay staff employed in the various trade shops, on the farm or as domestic staff.

8.25 The Resident Manager was also the Superior of the Community and had to perform these dual roles without any training or guidance.

8.26 In his report on Letterfrack commissioned by the Congregation in 2001, Mr Dunleavy BL identified the lack of any management structure:

In the course of interviews with Christian Brothers who had previously worked in the school, the evidence was that the Brother acting as Resident Manager of the school had complete powers with regard to the running of the school. There appears to have been a weekly Community conference in the school but this seems to have been an occasion when directions were given to the Community, rather than any proper discussion taking place regarding the running of the school.¹

The changing face of Letterfrack

8.27 Until 1954, Letterfrack was home to three categories of boys: those who were committed through the courts because they were homeless, without proper guardianship, destitute, in breach of the School Attendance Act or guilty of criminal offences; those sent by the Local Authorities pursuant to the Public Assistance Act 1949; and boys who were voluntarily admitted by parents or guardians.

8.28 On 12th January 1954 the Provincial Council, led by Br O'Hanlon,² met with the six Resident Managers of the Christian Brothers' schools. A decision was taken to close one of their schools because of the deteriorating financial position of the industrial schools, mainly attributed to falling numbers, which had resulted in a decline in income. Carriglea, situated in Dun Laoghaire, Co Dublin, was nominated for closure because it was the most suitable for use as a juniorate for the Congregation. A unanimous decision was also taken at the meeting to segregate 'juvenile delinquents' from other categories of boys and locate them all at Letterfrack, and it was felt that the closure of Carriglea would provide an ideal opportunity to put this plan into effect.

8.29 There was opposition to this proposal from the Departments of Justice and Education and the Judiciary. A meeting was convened on 14th May 1954, attended by Br O'Hanlon, District Justice McCarthy, who presided over the Dublin Metropolitan Children's Court, and representatives of the Department of Education. District Justice McCarthy indicated that he had grave concerns about the isolated location of Letterfrack, which made it unsuitable, in his view, as a school for young offenders. However, his protest fell on deaf ears. So, too, did a protest from District Justice Gleeson, who also pointed out the difficulties that would be caused by Letterfrack's remoteness.

8.30 The majority of the children in Letterfrack were from Dublin and Leinster. The percentage rose from 56% in the 1950s to 76% in the 1960s. These children would have been better served by the retention of Carriglea as an industrial school, where they could have had more access to parents and siblings.

¹ Letterfrack Industrial School, Report on archival material held at Cluain Mhuire, by Bernard Dunleavy BL (2001).

² This is a pseudonym.

- 8.31** The Provincial Council decided that all of the Public Assistance cases and ‘as many of the other boys who are in the school through no fault of their own as would leave the number of non-transferred boys at 85’ should be relocated from Letterfrack. This number represented the lowest number of boys that would enable the school to remain economically viable.
- 8.32** The Department of Education wrote to the relevant authorities, including the Departments of Health and Justice, District Justice McCarthy and the NSPCC, informing them of the decision of the Christian Brothers. They were informed that boys who had been convicted of offences would no longer be accepted in Artane, Salthill, Tralee or Glin.
- 8.33** On 30th June 1954 there were 179 boys resident in Letterfrack. On 2nd September 1954, 80 boys were transferred to other industrial schools, and 14 were released on supervision certificate. The 80 boys were distributed to Salthill, Artane and Kilkenny. On 30th September 1954 the Department of Education records show there were 87 boys resident in Letterfrack.
- 8.34** The Christian Brothers submitted in their Opening Statement that the Brothers were prepared to make this proposal, even though it meant a significant drop in numbers in Letterfrack and, consequently, an appreciable loss of income because of the decreased per capita payment. They felt the separation was in the best interests of the boys, even though the School would suffer economically.
- 8.35** There may have been other reasons apart from the best interests of the boys for making this decision. As the scourge of tuberculosis came under control, and the health of the nation improved, there were fewer orphans. Increasingly, neglected children were being sent to foster-parents or relatives, and fewer were being placed in institutions. Also, the birth rate was beginning to fall and fewer children were becoming destitute. On the other hand, more children were being convicted of larceny, housebreaking, malicious damage, arson, burglary, theft and assault, an increase already evident by 1953. With numbers in general dropping, it made sense to have a specialist institution for the one area of the child population that was increasing. Despite the very real concerns expressed by Judges who presided over the Children’s Court in Dublin and Limerick, and the slightly more defeatist attempts at opposition demonstrated by the Departments of Justice and Education, there was no evidence to suggest that the Christian Brothers gave any consideration to the impact their decision had on the children in their care.
- 8.36** What this scenario also demonstrated was that, while the Department of Education funded the industrial and reformatory schools and carried out periodic inspections of schools, these schools were in reality controlled by the Congregations that ran them, and it mattered little the level of opposition, or indeed who might be opposing any changes the Congregation proposed – their decision in the matter was final.
- 8.37** This decision had serious consequences for the boys in Letterfrack. The School had been reduced to a number that was not economically viable and this impacted on the level of care these boys received until Letterfrack closed in 1974. To survive, Letterfrack had to continue taking children who were destitute or in breach of the School Attendance Act, but these were now in a minority in the School.
- 8.38** The full implications of this decision are discussed below.

Closure of Letterfrack

- 8.39** On 28th September 1965 the Minister for Education met the Provincials from St Mary’s and St Helen’s Provinces, Br Mulholland and Br O Muimhneachain, together with representatives from Upton and Clonmel Industrial Schools. The meeting was convened to discuss the closure of some of the industrial schools. Br Mulholland stated that he would prefer to close Letterfrack rather than

Salthill, as the latter comprised property held in trust, whereas the Brothers were free to put the premises at Letterfrack to other use. In addition, he pointed out that, if another place of detention was opened, this would act to further deplete numbers in Letterfrack.

8.40 The Department received written confirmation in November 1965 from the Provincials of their agreement to close Letterfrack.

8.41 The Archbishop of Tuam, Reverend Joseph Walsh, when he was made aware of these plans by the Department of Education, wrote an indignant letter dated 17th March 1966 to Br Mulholland registering his shock and disappointment at the news. He noted that the Christian Brothers had spent at least £30,000 on the Institution between 1958 and 1966, and considered the decision to close the School as unjust in the circumstances. In his view, Letterfrack was one school that should not be closed. It was an excellent school for delinquent boys, as they could not escape easily because of its isolated location. He continued, 'in fact I know that the boys like the place. For many of them it is a pleasant change, and they are very happy'. He stated that he believed that the Brothers were being treated most unfairly and were not receiving the recognition they deserved for their work.

8.42 The Archbishop was clearly under the impression that Letterfrack was being closed against the wishes of the Brothers, and it seems that no attempt was made to rectify this misapprehension.

8.43 The Provincials met the representatives of the Department of Education on 28th March 1966. They explained that the Archbishop was against the closure of the school and that they did not want to go against his wishes.

8.44 From 1st July 1972, Letterfrack was recognised as a 'special school' by the Department of Education, which resulted in an increase in the grant payable by the Department of Education.

8.45 In 1973 the Provincial Council decided to close Letterfrack. The only information available regarding the reasons for the decision was found in a letter dated 27th August 1974, from the Secretary of the Department of Education to the Provincial of St Mary's Province, thanking the Brothers for their devoted work in Letterfrack. In the course of the letter he stated, 'we well understand also the reasons behind the decision of the Brothers to close the school – reasons that emanated from the difficulties of employing professional services in a place so remote as Letterfrack together with the doubt arising from having city boys in a school so far from home'. Letterfrack closed on 30th June 1974.

Investigation

8.46 The Investigation Committee conducted hearings in public and private sessions into abuse in Letterfrack. Br David Gibson, Provincial Leader of St Mary's Province, gave evidence in a public session on 16th June 2005. His evidence was based on a detailed Opening Statement submitted to the Commission in advance of the hearing.

8.47 The Investigation Committee then proceeded to hear evidence from complainants and respondents in private hearings, which ran from 17th June 2005 to 20th July 2005. Forty complainants were invited to give evidence to the Committee, and 25 did so. Fourteen respondent witnesses gave evidence at the private sessions.

8.48 In the third stage of the Investigation Committee's inquiry into Letterfrack, a public hearing was convened on 22nd May 2006, and Br Gibson once again gave evidence on behalf of the Congregation. This session focused on issues that arose as a result of the private hearings into Letterfrack and the documentary material furnished to the Commission.

8.49 In addition to oral evidence, the Committee considered documentary discovery material received from the Christian Brothers, the Department of Education and Science, An Garda Síochána, the Director of Public Prosecutions, the Archbishop of Tuam and the Health Service Executive (formerly the Western Health Board).

8.50 The Investigation Committee received Submissions from the Christian Brothers and also received written Submissions on behalf of a number of complainants and individual respondents. These Submissions were made following the oral hearings and in light of this evidence and the documentary evidence which emerged during the course of the inquiry.

8.51 The Christian Brothers made similar Submissions regarding Letterfrack as they made in relation to other institutions. They made the following qualified concessions regarding the main areas of contention that arose in relation to the investigation into Letterfrack:

It is accepted that, unfortunately, instances of abuse did occur but it is submitted that the level of abuse was not in any way as extensive or as widespread as the allegations and much of the surrounding publicity initially would have suggested. The question of the nature, extent and responsibility for the abuse is a very complex one and not subject to easy determination. However, it is submitted that the evidence does not support a finding that the Congregation itself is responsible for abuse.

It is further submitted that the occurrence of instances of sexual abuse should be viewed in the context of the secretive circumstances in which such abuse was perpetrated and the lack of contemporary insight into the recidivistic nature of paedophilia.

Physical abuse

Introduction

8.52 This part of the report comprises three sections based on the sources of evidence. First, the documentary material obtained by the Investigation Committee pursuant to the legal process of discovery of documents was analysed, and instances of physical abuse were catalogued, generally in chronological order, together with relevant evidence of complainant witnesses. Second, the evidence at the Phase II hearings given by Brothers and former Brothers who served in Letterfrack is detailed, again with complainant testimony. The third section sets out further reliable evidence of former residents.

Documented cases with evidence of victims and respondents

8.53 The Committee received documentary evidence in respect of seven cases that dealt with allegations of physical abuse by Brothers in Letterfrack. These cases gave an insight into how allegations were dealt with by the Congregation.

Use of a horse whip (1940)

8.54 On 8th April 1940, the Sub-Superior of Letterfrack, Br Vernay,³ by-passed the Superior and wrote a letter to the Provincial complaining about punishment in the School.

The punishment of the boys in Letterfrack has for some time past been of such a character that without going into detail I feel constrained to call your attention to the matter. The thing has now become public property and the rehearsal of the acts are not creditable to the school nor to those concerned. The instruments used and the punishments inflicted are now obsolete even in criminal establishments. Were it not for the frequency of the acts I should not have troubled you. I expect that an insistence on the prescriptions of the Rule without further ado will go far towards putting matters right. I may mention that there

³ This is a pseudonym

are differences of opinion in the Community at the moment in respect of these punishment in which I do not wish to become involved.

8.55 A member of the Provincial Council made a handwritten note on the letter that the Superior was queried on 10th April 1940 on the practices complained of, but there is no record of what the Superior said. Neither was the nature of the offensive punishments specified.

8.56 It is clear from the letter that the Sub-Superior was concerned as follows: first, as to the fact that the excessive and offensive punishments had been going on 'for some time past'; secondly, the matter was being discussed in public and thus causing discredit to the School and the Brothers; thirdly, the instruments used and the punishments inflicted were, he thought, wholly inappropriate; fourthly, he drew attention to divisions in the Community of Brothers about these punishments; and fifthly, and most importantly, it was the frequency of the acts that had impelled him to write.

8.57 A senior Brother in the Provincial team carried out the annual Visitation of the School in May. He found that there was a cleavage between the Brothers in the Community, in which most of them lined up on one side or the other and two sought to remain neutral. The source of the disharmony was the punishment of a number of boys who were guilty of improper conduct. The Superior commissioned two Brothers to punish them and they did this as the boys were going to bed 'using a horsewhip rather freely'. Two Brothers and a teacher witnessed the punishment from a distance, and one of the Brothers later characterised it as brutal and others agreed. The report went on:

The severe punishment was a subject of gossip in the workshops and village. The Superior realises that he acted imprudently in the matter and that the consequences might have been serious. The estrangement that followed these incidents made life in the Community unpleasant. Reconciliations have been effected and let us hope they will be lasting.

8.58 Notwithstanding the reference in Br Vernay's letter to the Provincial to the frequency of this punishment, later in the report the Visitor said:

Boys appear to be happy and contented and I was assured that outside the case of severe punishment alluded to above there has been no excessive punishment.

8.59 Following the Visitation, Br Corben,⁴ the Provincial, wrote to the Superior outlining some of the salient features of the report. He informed Br Troyes⁵ that the Superior General had written to the Provincial on the subject, stating:

One item of the Report is so serious that I confine my remarks to it. The Superior who permitted the punishment which the Law of the Congregation (Act 65 of Acts of General Chapter) forbids and humanity abhors should get more than a mere reprimand ... The reputation of the Congregation is at stake. A less offence in Prior Park⁶ was punished by fines, imprisonment, dismissal of the Head of the School, and an order from the Government to close the School or to put it under new management.

⁴ This is a pseudonym.

⁵ This is a pseudonym.

⁶ Prior Park was a residential school run by the Christian Brothers near Bath, England.

8.60 The part of the Superior General's letter that the Provincial omitted was:

a secular body who would continue an official in office after allowing a law to be set aside to permit an offence which the common law punishes does not merit public confidence. I wish you to discuss in Council what is to be done in this case with the Superior of Letterfrack. I think the offence should not be passed over.

8.61 There was no record of any action being taken against the Superior of Letterfrack on the strength of this suggestion, and he remained as Manager until the following year when his six-year tenure expired.

- 8.62**
- **The Congregation was aware that excessive punishment of children could be unlawful.**
 - **The Visitor accepted an assurance that this case was the only case of excessive punishment, although the Sub-Superior's letter, written less than a month before the Visitation, stressed that his reason for writing was the frequency of the acts.**
 - **The Visitor did not look into the other matters of concern in the Sub-Superior's letter, namely the duration, public knowledge, instruments used and nature of punishments.**
 - **The recommendation that the Brother Superior should receive 'more than a mere reprimand' appears to have been ignored.**
 - **The condition of the children who had been brutally horse-whipped was not given consideration in the correspondence.**

Br Leveret⁷ (1940)

8.63 The Resident Manager had occasion later in the same year to return to the subject of excessive corporal punishment with reference to one of the Brothers involved in the horsewhipping incident, which had happened in April. He wrote to the Br Provincial in November 1940 and stated:

At a Conference on the resumption of school business, I quoted Rules re Corp Punishment, Sup Gen's reference to my authorising "brutal punishment" during last term and in plain words I forbade certain types of punishment. I stated that, in future, in presence of a third party, I would punish for any serious offence amongst the boys. Br Leveret has not adhered to the regulations.

8.64 He referred to this Brother again in a subsequent letter:

Punishment: a stick is the general instrument used and even with this he goes beyond the rule. I have seen recently a boy with swollen hand, palm and thumb, the steward on farm remarked he was not able to milk for some days. A boy was stripped and beaten in (Br Leveret's) room. He has put boys across his bed in room and even in unbecoming postures to beat them behind. The boys are absolutely afraid to divulge who punished them and won't even answer questions truthfully, through fear of being punished again. Only this week I got two little fellows crying and I asked them what happened. They would not tell me.

8.65 The subject of this Brother's severity with the boys arose in correspondence concerning his removal from the position of Disciplinarian. In a letter written in November 1940 to the Provincial, the Brother said:

Since I came to this house I have never punished a single boy severely except on the one occasion when I was ordered to do so by my Superior. This was the occasion when a number of big boys were involved in immorality. I explained the matter to [the Visitor] and he said that I did right in obeying my Superior.

⁷ This is a pseudonym.

Since this Conference you referred to and for months before it I have not punished a single boy severely. I have, except on just a few occasions, used the leather at all times. On these few occasions when I had to give a slight punishment to a boy it was outside of school altogether and I had not got a leather on my person. Even then I never gave more than two slaps with an old piece of cane. In fact I have made it a rule for a long time back never to give more than one slap to a boy. I would be a most unreasonable Br were I to be severe to these poor boys who have obeyed and worked hard for me at all times. I know I have vexed the Superior a good many times because I did not punish the boys severely enough for his taste. He told me hundreds of times never to spare them. I will give you his own words in brackets. What are they but "illegitimates and pure dirt".

8.66 The Provincial's reply, if any, is not available but he appears to have sided against him, as Br Leveret was transferred to Salthill. The records of that Institution show that he was criticised for using excessive punishment in that school, in 1949 and 1950. In 1950, his Superior complained that he 'had injured at least two boys when inflicting corporal punishment'.

8.67 The Congregation's comment was as follows:

The above incident demonstrates well how the Brothers generally did not approve of severe corporal punishment. Those who did not approve were courageous enough to speak out even though it meant having to live with the person against whom they spoke. The contention that those religious who did not abuse were culpable because they did not "stand in the way" of abuse they witnessed does not stand up to scrutiny. When abuse was known to a Brother, the documentation indicates that he made it known to the authorities.

- 8.68**
- **This case is evidence of a particular feature of congregational life, namely, that complaints were more likely to be made when relations were poor in the Community or where some other issue was present.**
 - **The management saw the problem in this case, not in terms of the cruel and unauthorised punishment of the boys but rather the combination of insubordination by Br Leveret and poor inter-Community relations.**
 - **Transferring Br Leveret to Salthill, which was the way in which the problem was dealt with, did nothing to reduce his propensity for violence in his dealings with boys.**
 - **The Rules and Regulations of the Congregation and of the Department of Education on corporal punishment were disregarded by Br Leveret, but the Superior did not enforce them, even in the knowledge that the Brother had frightened boys to the point where they would not truthfully answer questions about him.**
 - **A matter deserving of investigation in itself was whether the Superior had described the boys as 'illegitimates and pure dirt', and the outcome ought to have been censure either of the Superior for what he said or of the Brother for his false attribution of offensive words.**

Br Perryn⁸ (1941)

8.69 Br Perryn was in Letterfrack for two periods totalling 19 years between 1913 and the early 1940s. In 1941 he was discovered to have been sexually abusing the boys in his charge. The Visitor noted:

Boys whom I interviewed told me that they were afraid to reveal the malpractices through fear of Br Perryn. It is alleged that he beats them, kicks them, catches them by the throat etc. and uses them for immoral ends.

⁸ This is a pseudonym.

8.70 This was not the first complaint that had been made against Br Perryn in respect of his use of excessive corporal punishment. In April 1917, the Sub-Superior of Letterfrack, Br Gardiner,⁹ wrote to the Superior complaining of Br Perryn's 'notorious' severity towards the boys:

Last Autumn I complained of Br Perryn's harsh and cruel treatment, and now he still continues along the same lines. About a month ago he took a boy out of bed at near 10 o'clock at night and punished him in the lavatory in his night-shirt, and that because the boy took a pinch of salt out of the salt box on the table in the boy's kitchen. About a week after he did the same to another boy who took a potato off the table in the boy's kitchen and on last Thursday night, about 10 o'clock, he did the same to another boy for calling him names! In each case he acted on the report of another boy ... I stood and counted 27 slaps given in the space of about five minutes to some juniors in the knitting room. He uses a rod also and strikes them on the legs and I have been told uses it wildly and wantonly as if for sport sometimes ... His severity in the knitting room is notorious – and the more so to be deplored as many of the young children are delicate and their hands are sore, chilblains being prevalent among them.

8.71 Br Perryn remained in Letterfrack for two years after this letter was written and returned eight years later, where he continued his reign of terror until he was finally removed in 1941 because of sexual abuse of boys.

8.72 Noah Kitterick,¹⁰ who was detained in the school from 1924 to 1932, named this Brother in a letter of complaint sent to the Superior in 1953, which is considered in more detail in the later section on sexual abuse.

8.73 The Congregation in its Opening Statement commented:

It is difficult to explain how Br Perryn was reappointed to Letterfrack when he had been found to have been physically abusive during his first period in Letterfrack ...

- 8.74**
- **Br Perryn spent 14 years in Letterfrack on his second assignment there and, in addition to sexual abuse of boys, he was also violent and frightening to them.**
 - **If the Brothers considered what Br Perryn had done to the boys to be a serious infraction, they would have responded effectively to this complaint at the time and thereby spared other children.**

A black eye explained (1943)

8.75 A Department of Education General Inspection was carried out on 31st August 1943. The report noted that the health of the boys was very good and that the Resident Manager, Br Marcel¹¹ was kind and good to the boys. The Inspector did notice one case of a boy with a black eye and, on inquiring as to the cause, was informed that it was the result of a blow from a Brother. The Department of Education took the matter up with the Resident Manager:

It appears, however, that she found one boy suffering from a black eye and was informed that it was the result of a blow from one of the Brothers for talking in class. The Minister would be glad to learn whether, this in fact, was the case and if so, I am to request you to forbid correction of this kind in future as it is both extremely dangerous and undesirable.

⁹ This is a pseudonym.

¹⁰ This is a pseudonym.

¹¹ This is a pseudonym.

8.76 Br Marcel replied that the black eye was the result of an accident. He explained the matter as follows:

The Resident Manager regrets the occurrence indicated and he has no doubt that there shall not be a recurrence of a like nature. The Brother while remonstrating with his class happened accidentally to strike the boy who stood behind him with his elbow in the face.

8.77 In Phase III, Br Gibson was asked whether this seemed like a plausible explanation and he said:

Well, it doesn't, but I'm not going to judge. I mean you are talking about 60 years ago, so I just don't know. It doesn't sound plausible no, it doesn't.

8.78 • **The Department of Education properly sought an explanation for the injury but accepted without further question a manifestly implausible account that was inconsistent with what the Inspector had been told. This was one of many instances where the Department allowed the Institution itself to investigate complaints. The boy does not appear to have been questioned in the course of the investigation.**

Br Maslin:¹² Br Aubin's¹³ complaint (1945)

8.79 As the Visitor prepared to leave Letterfrack after his four-day inspection in April 1945, Br Aubin wrote a hurried note to him. There had probably been a conversation between the Visitor and the Brother, in which it was proposed that the complaint which Br Aubin wished to make should be put in writing. The note described a serious disagreement between the writer and the Disciplinarian, Br Maslin, concerning severe punishments that the latter had inflicted on boys. The circumstances outlined to the Visitor were revealing of different aspects of life in the Institution. The case is therefore important for a number of reasons.

8.80 By way of background, the Visitation Report for the previous year recorded disharmony between the two Brothers involved in this episode and also involving, to a lesser extent, other members of the Letterfrack Community.

8.81 The events related in the note are best listed in sequence:

- Br Aubin learned that a boy who was in charge of 15 or more other boys working on the farm ill-treated them by beating them severely with a leather. The boy had done this on three occasions.
- The Brother reported the matter to the Disciplinarian, Br Maslin, who knew about it already. They decided that the boy should be punished 'as he had not been allowed or told to punish these boys'.
- Br Aubin suggested informing the Superior but his colleague dismissed this. Br Maslin said that there was more than punishment wrong between this boy and the others, meaning sexual activity. On this the Brothers disagreed.
- A few days passed during which Br Aubin questioned the boy in charge and 13 of the others who were on the farm. He was satisfied that nothing more than the unauthorised punishment had taken place.
- On the next Sunday, Br Maslin meted out punishment to a boy, which left him with a swollen cheek, for allegedly allowing another boy into his bed or going into the other's bed. The boy emphatically denied the charge.
- Later on that day, Br Maslin punished the farm boy in the surgery off the school, in the presence of Br Aubin who believed that the boy was innocent of immorality and that his only wrongdoing was unauthorised beatings of other boys. During the punishment,

¹² This is a pseudonym. See also the Tralee chapter.

¹³ This is a pseudonym

Br Maslin accused the boy of carrying on immorally with the boys on the farm and he confessed – out of fear, as Br Aubin believed – and gave some 15 names of those with whom he had offended, including among them the 13 previously interviewed by Br Aubin and found innocent. Before he finished punishing the boy, the Disciplinary sent Br Aubin to bring back the boy who suffered the swollen cheek in the earlier beating and who was also on the farm at the material time.

- This boy was then accused of having oral sex with the boy in charge, which he denied, but he was nevertheless punished severely.
- The next day, Br Aubin spoke once more to the boy in charge on the farm, who assured him that none of what he had told Br Maslin was true and that he said what the Brother wanted him to say for fear of further punishment.
- Br Aubin went back to the farm boys he had previously interviewed and confirmed his view that there had been no immorality.
- Br Maslin remained convinced that he was right and refused to accompany Br Aubin to speak to the boys again. He declared his intention to punish all the boys who had not already been punished and, in addition, to punish the boy in charge for going back on his confession.
- Br Aubin told the Brothers who were in charge of the farm boys in the School and the dormitory, and they in turn inquired into the sexual allegations and rejected them. The Superior was informed at last.
- One of the School and dormitory Brothers recalled another previous unsubstantiated allegation by the Disciplinary of sexual misconduct by a boy.
- The Visitor left a typewritten list of 22 recommendations with the Superior, including no. 9 with the underlined words added in handwriting:

Manager to be present when punishment beyond the ordinary is being administered.

8.82 Some other points in Br Aubin's letter should be mentioned.

8.83 Firstly, Br Aubin and the Disciplinary were agreed that the boy temporarily in charge on the farm was wrong because 'he had not been allowed or told to punish' the other boys. The implication was that there could have been circumstances in which he would be authorised to do so. It may be that too much should not be read into this, taking account of the rushed nature of the letter, but the distinct impression remains that it was not the fact of punishment in itself but the punishment not having been authorised that was the real offence committed by the boy in charge.

8.84 Secondly, when the two Brothers were discussing the sexual allegation involving the boy in charge, Br Aubin defended him by pointing out that 'through all the morbid cases in the past his name was never mentioned'. This was recognition of the scale of the problem of sexual activity between boys in Letterfrack.

8.85 Thirdly, the Disciplinary turned down the suggestion that the Superior should be informed and gave as one of his reasons that, when he took a case on a previous occasion to the Superior, the latter did not believe the witnesses, and the boy accused of sexual misconduct went unpunished.

8.86 Finally, the letter acknowledged that the Disciplinary 'can inflict terrible punishment on children and the boys have a terrible dread of his anger'.

8.87 Br Maslin was transferred to another industrial school, Carriglea, in January 1946.

8.88 The Congregation's Opening Statement commented on this case as follows:

Once again, the complaints were acted upon and the offending person taken out of the situation. Why he was transferred to Carriglea in 1946 for 4 years, and later to day schools, is not known.

8.89 Br Maslin was sent to Carriglea at a time when it had deteriorated into near anarchy due to the ineffectiveness and incompetence of successive Resident Managers. The Congregation realised that drastic measures were called for. Br Maslin continued his abusive practices in Carriglea when he was transferred there. He was described by one complainant in Carriglea as the most feared of the Brothers there.

- 8.90**
- **The problem that the Congregation dealt with in this case was the dispute between two Brothers; it did not deal with the cruel or unjust treatment of the boys or the failure of management to protect them.**
 - **The contents of Br Aubin's letter should have caused alarm to the Leadership of the Christian Brothers. If what he said was true, it disclosed a very serious episode of cruelty and injustice in Letterfrack. If what he said was not true, severe disciplinary action was called for against him.**
 - **There should have been an immediate investigation into Br Maslin's extreme violence against children for alleged offences that were denied by the boys and were disbelieved by other Brothers.**
 - **The case illustrates how management was unable to deal with disputes between Brothers, even though they had a knock-on effect throughout the Institution and could lead to boys becoming victims of these disputes.**
 - **Recommendation no. 9, as typed by the Visitor before he left Letterfrack, read 'Manager to be present when punishment is being administered'. This was, in effect, a re-statement of the requirements of the Rules and Regulations governing industrial schools. The insertion of the words 'beyond the ordinary' amounted to a qualification. The amendment was highly significant because its effect was to render the injunction meaningless. It was a matter of individual interpretation what constituted punishment for which the Manager's presence was required. The addition of these three words illustrated that keeping corporal punishment as an option for all Brothers was deemed essential to the running of the Institution.**

Br Percival¹⁴ (1949)

8.91 The Visitation Report for 1949 was critical of Br Percival for being over-severe in the administration of discipline in the classroom. He was in Letterfrack for six years during the late 1940s and mid-1950s.

8.92 The 1949 Report stated:

Discipline in the school is good, and is maintained without undue severity. Br Percival has been over severe at times. The Superior has spoken to him about the matter, and I also made mention of it. He seems to be sincerely determined to have no relapse.

8.93 Br Sorel¹⁵ worked in Letterfrack during the same period and he gave evidence to the Investigation Committee. He had a vivid recollection of Br Percival who arrived in Letterfrack at the same time as him. Br Sorel remembered him as very harsh and as someone who punished severely. He tended to overdo it and would hurt the boys. He said that he could hear Br Percival in the classroom overdoing it with the strap. He would hear the noise of the strap on the hand. Br Percival was noisier than anyone else. Br Sorel said that there was a rule that they were not

¹⁴ This is a pseudonym.

¹⁵ This is a pseudonym.

allowed to punish for lessons. However, Br Percival punished boys for minor misdemeanours. He recalled that, one night at tea, one of the Brothers, Br Noell,¹⁶ reprimanded Br Percival for being overly severe. A number of boys reported Br Percival to the Superior for his severity in the dormitories and, as a result, he was removed from dormitory duty and was replaced by Br Sorel, who was asked by the Superior to take over.

8.94 There was evidence from former residents as to the severity of this Brother. He seems to have been immature and vicious and perhaps somewhat unstable. If his county did badly in a GAA match, he would react extremely angrily and take it out on the boys in the classroom and in the School the following day.

8.95 A complainant who was resident in the late 1940s said that he treated all the boys badly and was always picking on his brother. He used to put his brother at the back of the class and beat him. The witness also described how Br Percival beat him for failure at lessons.

8.96 The Congregation in its response to these allegations confirmed that there was a Br Percival in Letterfrack but that he had since left the Christian Brothers and therefore the Congregation was not in a position to either accept or reject the specific allegation. The response statement went on:

It should be noted however that the Congregation has no contemporaneous record of any complaint having been made against Br Percival. Further, the allegation does not accord with what is recorded of Br Percival in the Visitation report of 1950. It notes that Br Percival is “sympathetic to the poor children ... in this institution”.

8.97 It was regrettable that in its response the Congregation chose to quote from the 1950 Visitation Report, but ignored the 1949 one which is quoted above and which referred to Br Percival being ‘over severe at times’. The complainant in this case came to give evidence in the belief that his allegations were regarded as ill-founded. The Congregation’s failure to address these allegations properly was all the more regrettable in circumstances where a serving member of the Congregation, Br Sorel, could have given a first-hand account of his experience of Br Percival. Fortunately, Br Sorel was available to give evidence.

8.98 A complainant who was resident from the late 1940s to the mid-1950s said that Br Percival was fanatical about sports and if the boys were not playing well he would hit them with his hurley. He also said that, if Br Percival’s team lost at hurling, he would be violent towards the boys for the following week. However, he stressed that Br Percival’s bad temper was not limited to the sports field. He said that Br Percival was very severe in the classroom as well. He used to beat the boys for talking or failure at lessons. He described one particular incident where Br Percival beat a boy, who had to wear callipers, for talking in class:

This day he took this lad who was talking in the class, and he said, “get out there”. [The boy], had callipers on his legs, he could hardly walk. When he got out he just gave him a dig with his fist, knocked him to the floor and jumped on him like he was a bag of potatoes. That lad was in callipers.

8.99 Another complainant confirmed that Br Percival would be in a bad temper and mistreat the boys if his team lost at hurling.

8.100 The Congregation’s response was the same for this case, and so the complainant came to the Commission in the belief that his allegations were viewed with suspicion by the Congregation. No effort was made to investigate the allegations, but the Congregation adopted a position of scepticism as a default position that was not helpful to the individual complainant.

¹⁶ This is a pseudonym.

8.101 A complainant who was resident in the late 1940s, who did not identify Br Percival in his original statement, gave evidence that he was quite good at handball and that one evening Br Percival told him to play with him against the cobbler and the tailor. They lost and Br Percival slapped him across the mouth. He later offered him a glass of lemonade but he couldn't drink it as he was too sore.

8.102 Br Percival spent a total of six years in Letterfrack. Having completed his teacher training he returned to Letterfrack for a year before being transferred to a day school in Dublin. He applied for and was granted secularisation in the late 1950s.

8.103 The Congregation did not address the allegations against this Brother in its Closing Submissions.

- 8.104**
- **Br Percival was an unstable man who should not have been teaching or caring for children, particularly in a residential school like Letterfrack where his propensity for violence could extend beyond the classroom and where the children had no parental protection.**
 - **Br Percival's irrational and unpredictable behaviour generated fear and insecurity in the boys, who found it impossible to avoid punishment.**
 - **Br Percival's violence was known to the authorities in Letterfrack, and the fact that he was allowed to remain for so long is evidence that preventing this kind of abuse of power and trust was not a priority.**
 - **The Congregation's attempt to defend Br Percival by reference to a favourable Visitation Report was not balanced, as it should have been, by making reference to the other, unfavourable Report.**

Complaint by Noah Kitterick

8.105 Noah Kitterick was a resident of Letterfrack from 1924 to 1932, which is outside the relevant period of this investigation. The reason why his story appears here is because of the response of the Congregation to his private and public complaints about Letterfrack. These began with two letters to the Superior of Letterfrack in 1953, and concluded with a visit to the Superior General in 1957. Mr Kitterick died tragically when he set fire to himself in London in 1967.

8.106 Mr Kitterick wrote two letters in 1953 to the Superior of Letterfrack, in which he complained about three named Brothers in Letterfrack. He claimed that they were tyrannical and sadistic:

Bros Piperel,¹⁷ Corvax¹⁸ and Perryn ... these men were a disgrace to the Christian Brothers. Piperel and Corvax were tyrants. Br Perryn who was in the cook-house and refectory took great pleasure in beating boys for no reason, he was a sadist, for beating us he used a piece of rubber motor tyre.

Almost daily we were flogged by one or other of these Bros. Dozens of times I left the dining room with my hands bleeding ...

On several occasions after a meal, I was taken to the pantry ... by Br Perryn. He would lock the door and make me undress he would then sit on a stool and would put me across his knee and then flog me savagely he would then pinch me until I was unconscious.

8.107 Mr Kitterick followed up this letter with another, two days later, in which he said that he wished to see Letterfrack closed until improvements could be made there and the perpetrators of abuse brought to justice.

8.108 His letters were not replied to.

¹⁷ This is a pseudonym.

¹⁸ This is a pseudonym.

- 8.109** The Brothers he identified were all members of the Community in Letterfrack during his time there, although the presence of one Brother, Br Corvax, was only verified by the Congregation in 2007. Mr Kitterick made a spelling mistake in one of the names but that did not prevent easy identification of the person.
- 8.110** The Christian Brothers knew that the principal culprit named by Mr Kitterick, Br Perryn, had a history of serious physical and sexual abuse of boys, as recorded in the Congregation's documents.
- 8.111** The third Brother, Br Piperel had, to the Congregation's knowledge as recorded in their documents, a history of sexually improper and suggestive behaviour which had necessitated his urgent removal from a day school. Notwithstanding this information, the Congregation maintained complete silence in the face of Mr Kitterick's letters.
- 8.112** Mr Kitterick met with the Provincial of the Congregation in 1957. In a letter to the Congregation's solicitors, the Provincial said that he thought Mr Kitterick was on a 'blackmail ticket':
- This evening I had a "gentleman" named Kitterick ex-British army to see me. He said he was an ex-pupil of our industrial school in Letterfrack and that the doctors had said that all his troubles were due to the hardship he got whilst in Letterfrack. I took it that he was working on the blackmail ticket and after listening to him for some time I gave him your name and address as our solicitor. I know you will know how to deal with him if he approaches.
- 8.113** Mr Kitterick continued his campaign:
- During the last ten years I have reported about conditions in Letterfrack, which I have no reason to think have changed very much, to the Archbishop of Dublin, Dr McQuaid, and Dr Browne Bishop of Galway, as well as President de Valera, and to the Superiors of many industrial schools. I have yet to receive a reply.¹⁹
- 8.114** In the public hearing on Letterfrack, Br Gibson explained the silence of the Congregation on this issue:
- I think it was a totally inadequate response. We have been dealing with allegations of abuse over the last 10 years and certainly one of the things we would always do is listen to the person who has the complaint and pay great attention to it. We would assure them that we would investigate it and we would look to see is there any veracity in it. I think there was certainly in the past, and say 10 years ago when the issue of child abuse came to the fore, there was general disbelief that this could happen. I think generally people were saying this couldn't happen in the Brothers and I think there was general horror, disbelief, denial. I think with time we have discovered that it has happened in the past. Certainly the Leadership of the time, it was probably one or two cases that they were dealing with and probably saw it, particularly when he was mentioning a Brother who wasn't in Letterfrack amongst those three, they were probably holding on to that idea it's not all true, therefore, can't any of it be true. I think that was unfortunate.*
- 8.115** The explanation that allegations of child abuse would have been met with 'general horror, disbelief, denial', even in 1957, is difficult to sustain in view of the number of cases of sexual and physical mistreatment of boys that the Congregation had dealt with. Brothers had been dismissed, moved or been given Canonical Warnings for such activities. All of the industrial schools run by the Congregation had experienced abuse, and so it was not correct to claim ignorance of this problem.

¹⁹ This document is undated, although the date '6th November 1964' is crossed out.

8.116 When the first complaint was received from Mr Kitterick in 1953, even the most cursory investigation of the files would have disclosed that Br Perryn had been reprimanded for his severity in 1917 and, in 1941, just 12 years previously, had been removed for physical and sexual abuse after the Visitor to Letterfrack received complaints from the boys there: 'They are so shockingly obscene, revolting and abominable that it is hard to believe them'.

8.117 Br Piperel had been the subject of a serious allegation of sexual abuse in Letterfrack that was documented in the Congregation's records, which also implied that he had a previous history of interference with boys. He worked in industrial schools until the 1950s and then moved to a day school. He was removed from a day school in Cork for sexually inappropriate behaviour towards a young girl just a few months prior to Mr Kitterick's first letter.

8.118 The information recently provided by the Congregation confirmed that the third Brother named by Mr Kitterick was in Letterfrack during his time. It follows that, if the Brothers who dealt with this correspondence decided to ignore it because he had named a Brother who was not present, they were entirely wrong. The Brothers at the time could have established whether the third Brother was there if there was any doubt about the matter. The possibility that the Congregation decided its response on this basis was not grounded in any document but was an interpretation advanced by Br Gibson on behalf of the current Congregation.

- 8.119**
- **The Congregation's refusal to respond to Noah Kitterick's complaints was indicative of an organisation that chose not to investigate criticism or admit failings.**
 - **The Congregation sought to protect itself from the allegations rather than seeking to ascertain the truth.**
 - **The Christian Brothers' records contained potential corroborative material, and the complaints warranted full investigation.**
 - **The Congregation's current position is that allegations of abuse, both physical and sexual, came as a shock to the Congregation, but such allegations had been dealt with for many years.**

Br Verrill²⁰

8.120 Br Verrill worked in Letterfrack in the early 1960s, having been transferred from Artane. He was the subject of written complaints about his treatment of boys in Artane in the late 1950s which are dealt with in full in the Artane chapter.

Evidence of individual respondents

8.121 Fourteen former members of staff, 13 Brothers or ex-Brothers and one lay-man, gave evidence about corporal punishment. They were in Letterfrack between 1948 and 1974.

Br Sorel

8.122 Br Sorel was a teacher in Letterfrack from the late 1940s until the late 1950s. He also worked in the dormitories. He said that Letterfrack was a harsh place:

The whole experience. I cannot justify it. It was too strict and the lads were great that they were able to accept it and come through it ...

8.123 The need for strictness had been impressed upon him at an early stage:

I was as strict as anybody else. The system was strict and we were told at the very beginning that unless we had discipline, that there would be chaos, there would be chaos.

²⁰ This is a pseudonym.

8.124 He was told by senior Brothers never to let his guard down and to maintain an aloof and stern visage. He did so even though he was fearful inside:

One of the Brothers said to me, “Whatever you do don’t smile, walk along with a very serious face”, and I was shivering. Nobody knew that. I was shivering in my boots. Quite a number of the lads there were big strong lads, ... huge guys there, I was shivering in my shoes because I never had this experience.

8.125 These same Brothers also told him that, by being strict, he would be better able to keep control, which resulted in his punishing boys unnecessarily.

8.126 According to Br Sorel, absconders were treated particularly harshly. Their heads were shaved and they were often forced to march around the yard in silence during recreation periods. They were also forced to sit with their backs to the screen during the weekly cinema performance. He described this as a fierce punishment because the weekly film was so eagerly anticipated by everybody in the School.

8.127 He found the work very difficult. He taught three classes and had responsibility for one of the dormitories. He would get up at 5:45am, attend morning prayers, wake the boys, bring them to Mass, take them to the refectory, have his own breakfast, supervise the morning chores, bring them to school, and teach until lunchtime. The boys would then go to the various trade shops for industrial training. This was his first break. He would supervise them again and bring them to bed.

8.128 Br Sorel made the shocking admission that he forced a boy to eat his own excrement. The boy was not a complainant to the Investigation Committee but the incident was recounted by a complainant who had witnessed it. The Brother in his written response to the Investigation Committee accepted that the allegation was true. In evidence he told the Committee:

Well the ... thing has haunted me all my life. It should never have happened. Actually he didn’t eat the excrement, he spat it into the basin, that doesn’t matter, it was wrong, totally wrong, and I accept that. I accept full responsibility for it. It was cruel.

8.129 When asked by the Committee why he did it, he said that he was stressed by having to cope with boys who soiled themselves, particularly during the night. He asked colleagues what he should do about one particular boy:

A few days before I mentioned this to some of the staff, “what will I do”, I couldn’t get any help from anybody. One of them quite cynically said, “make him eat his own shit”. When I think now on this particular morning, he did it right out in the floor in front of everybody and I saw red, I saw anger, I thought he was doing it purposefully to ridicule me. I think that was the reason.

8.130 He added that as soon as he had calmed down he knew he had gone too far and he subsequently apologised to the boy in question.

- 8.131**
- **The stresses of working in Letterfrack as teacher and carer caused this young, untrained and inexperienced Brother to behave in a shameful manner towards a troubled child.**
 - **This disgusting incident was not unique: another example is reported in the Artane chapter.**
 - **With hindsight the Brother was able to recognise the severity of the regime in Letterfrack and the damage it could do to both Brothers and boys.**

Br Dax²¹

- 8.132** Br Dax was in Letterfrack from the late 1950s to mid-1970s, except for one year. In 2003, he was convicted of 25 counts of sexual abuse committed during this period. His evidence is dealt with in detail in the section on sexual abuse.
- 8.133** His evidence is also relevant in this section. He admitted using violence and the threat of violence to prevent boys he sexually abused from reporting him. He also admitted to being a generally cruel and violent person. He agreed that he was an angry man with a bizarre prejudice against boys from County Limerick. He admitted that if he lost his temper he hit boys with whatever he had in his hands and that he could have drawn blood on such occasions. He also accepted in cross-examination that it was possible that he would have walked up behind them and struck them on the back of the head just to get their attention.
- 8.134**
- **How Br Dax could have continued unchecked for such a long period of time is a question that arises acutely in regard to sexual abuse of boys.**
 - **His use of premeditated violence in some circumstances, and capricious violence in others, should of itself have triggered an investigation that might have uncovered the full extent of his abusive activities.**

Br Francois²²

- 8.135** This Brother, who served there for two years from the late 1950s to the early 1960s, made a number of important concessions in relation to Letterfrack. He confirmed that he was not given any specific instruction on punishment and that the use of the leather strap, which some Brothers carried around with them all the time, was totally discretionary. He also said he had no recollection of a punishment book during his time there.
- 8.136** He said that boys would only be referred to the Disciplinarian for serious breaches of the rules such as fighting. The individual Brother dealt with minor infractions on the spot.
- 8.137** Boys who were caught near another boy's bed at night were slapped on the buttocks. This punishment was administered in the dormitory or in the washroom attached to it. He said that he frequently administered punishment on the hands, but that slapping boys on the buttocks was a rare occurrence.
- 8.138** He remembered one incident where a number of boys who had absconded were lined up and slapped by the Disciplinarian in front of the rest of the school.
- 8.139** He said absconders also had their heads shaved as punishment.

Br Michel²³

- 8.140** Br Michel was in Letterfrack in the 1960s during which time he was the Disciplinarian. He accepted that Letterfrack was a strict place but he stressed that it had to be:

²¹ This is a pseudonym.

²² This is a pseudonym.

²³ This is a pseudonym

Well, it was a pretty strict place and I think that the children who came had a carefree life before coming. It was necessary to discipline them and unfortunately they had to be disciplined otherwise we couldn't run the place.

8.141 He also confirmed that all the Brothers who worked in the school carried straps and that discipline was administered at the total discretion of the individual Brother.

8.142 He described the punishment of forcing boys to run around the yard. He beat boys on the buttocks with a leather, but said he was unsure whether he beat on the bare buttocks. He acknowledged that it occurred and accepted that he may have punished in that way.

8.143 He admitted to an allegation of physical abuse made against him by a complainant and apologised for the incident. The complainant, who was resident in the early 1960s, described how the Brother was asking him questions about his absence from the school grounds. When the boy repeated a question that the Brother asked, the latter lost his temper and jumped on the boy and started beating him up in front of the whole refectory. In his evidence to the Committee, the Brother accepted that he had been 'over-robust' in his punishment of the witness. He said that it was one of his bad days and he sincerely regretted it because the witness was generally a good boy.

8.144 He also spoke about the relationship between overwork and excessive punishment. He stated that the Brothers worked under considerable strain. The number working with the boys was small and the hours were 'desperately long'. He sometimes took his stress out on the boys and he did not always comply with the rules governing corporal punishment.

8.145 When asked by the Committee whether he thought that corporal punishment was used more in Letterfrack than in other schools elsewhere, he said:

Regretfully, I think it was more simply because most schools were day schools and they wouldn't have the same problems as a boarding situation. Regretfully, the times that were in it unfortunately.

Br Telfour²⁴

8.146 Br Telfour served in Letterfrack in the mid to late 1960s. He was a teacher and was Disciplinary for a year. He told the Committee that Letterfrack was a regulated place and that he had no difficulty managing the boys. A Visitation Report stated:

The disciplinarian ... understands his charges very well and realises that harsh methods do not produce lasting results. He is most patient and has good control.

8.147 He did not like corporal punishment but he did recall one incident when he snapped and beat a boy out of frustration. He said that he did not carry a strap, although he conceded that there were straps available in the school. Absconding was a problem and he heard that boys who absconded 'got it on the bare', which he understood to mean that they were beaten on their bare buttocks.

8.148 He told the Committee that when he was appointed Disciplinary he told the Manager that he refused to administer this form of corporal punishment. He was asked to explain the circumstances of this conversation:

²⁴ This is a pseudonym

It was in the yard and a boy had been brought back early that morning from absconding, I knew the punishment previously had been the beating on the buttocks but I had my own mind made up I wasn't going to inflict it and I told him that I didn't want to beat them that way.

8.149 He explained the reasons for his dislike of corporal punishment:

It was based on the fact that after a little while there I felt that these young people had suffered enough, they had been taken from their parents and from growing up with their brothers and sisters. The more I thought of that the bigger the influence it had on me in coming to that decision, that none of them would be slapped in my classroom and none of them would be slapped in this way.

8.150 He admitted using running as a punishment on the recommendation of the Sub-Superior. The circumstances of one such incident were that he was waiting in the yard for the boys to return from the farm. A boy came into the yard and asked him whether the farmhand was allowed to beat him. The boy was bleeding and he told him to go and clean up. The farmhand and the farm Brother came to the yard and told him that some of the boys tried to attack Br Deverelle²⁵ and that the farmhand tried to stop them. He told the farmhand that he had no business beating the boys. He was at a loss as to what to do, since a large number of boys were involved and so he put them running around the yard as a punishment, which they had to do for periods on two nights. The boys contended that they had attacked Br Deverelle because he had been severe on them.

8.151 This Brother was sympathetic towards the boys and tried to avoid using corporal punishment, but in these respects he was unusual. The Committee was left with the impression that his refusal to impose such punishment did not stop it and he had no influence on the behaviour of other Brothers.

Br Rainger²⁶

8.152 Br Rainger was a teacher in Letterfrack in the late 1960s. He said that he was wholly unprepared for life there and found that he simply could not apply the teaching methods he had learned in Marino to the boys at Letterfrack. His duties also included supervision and he would often be required to supervise a group of over 100 boys because staffing levels did not allow smaller groups. This meant that a military-style discipline was necessary to keep order. He accepted that, as a result of this, Letterfrack was a harsh place but he stressed it was harsh for the Brothers too. Initially, he said he was quite aloof as an aid to maintaining discipline, although he mellowed after a while. However, he never trusted the boys:

No, I wouldn't trust them, I had been told that the boys had come to Letterfrack through the court.

8.153 He said he carried and used a leather strap, as did every Brother working in the School. He received no training in its use and administered it on an ad hoc basis whenever he saw fit to do so. He did not require any sanction to do this and he punished both inside and outside the classroom. He admitted to beating children on the buttocks, although not the bare buttocks, with the strap. He thought that discipline was not too bad, although he conceded that he punished boys for failure at lessons and for misbehaving generally.

²⁵ This is a pseudonym.

²⁶ This is a pseudonym.

8.154 He was never aware of the presence of a punishment book, and on the issue of discipline he said:

Generally speaking, you know, it wasn't too bad. Discipline wasn't too bad, but now and again, yes, fights broke out, arguments broke out. I had a leather and I used it, not that I am proud of it now but I did use it, yes.

8.155 Br Rainger admitted that he did not confine himself to the strap when he punished children but also used his hands. He denied that bed-wetters were physically chastised. He recalled that they tied knots at the ends of their beds to identify themselves to the night watchman:

Just to clarify the thing on the bed-wetters, when I would take over the dormitory in the morning from the night watchman the custom at that time was if they were bed-wetters they tied a towel over the end of the bed and the bed was stripped so that it could dry out during the day. There was definitely no verbal humiliation or even physical punishment for bed-wetting. That is not true.

Br Anatole²⁷

8.156 Br Anatole was convicted in 2003 of sexual abuse of boys in Letterfrack when he was a Brother there during the late 1960s.

8.157 He gave evidence that the Brothers worked 16 to 18 hour days, and that their only method of maintaining order was by means of corporal punishment, the constant threat of which permeated the atmosphere of the Institution. Before he came to the School, he had heard rumours about the need to maintain strict discipline in the School. The attitude was that breaches of discipline had to be dealt with swiftly and harshly, otherwise law and order would break down.

8.158 Br Anatole described his arrival at Letterfrack with two other young, inexperienced teachers, Br Dondre²⁸ and Br Iven.²⁹ They were all in their early 20s and they had little more than one year's teaching experience.

8.159 The bulk of the supervisory work in Letterfrack fell on these three young men, and Br Anatole testified to the strain he felt – a breach of the rules by a boy under the control of one of them was regarded as a reflection on the Brother. This put a lot of pressure on the younger Brothers, who were often intimidated by the boys and they tried to counteract this by being excessively strict.

8.160 Br Anatole said that pupils attacked him on a number of occasions:

I was attacked on a couple of occasions: Once in the dining room a boy ran at me with a chair; once in the yard; and once in the Brother's monastery when I went up – I opened the door and one of the boys was in the monastery which they weren't allowed to do and he punched me trying to get out the door before I could get in. That was three incidents in two years which was not a lot. There was always the possibility of that happening and I was a little bit fearful of what might be done to me if it happened.

8.161 The children were often difficult to deal with, according to Br Anatole, and many had psychological problems that the Brothers had no special training to deal with.

8.162 Difficulties manifested themselves in conduct such as fighting and bullying, which were constant and worrying features of life in Letterfrack. Sometimes, the children absconded and that was also a constant worry. The children would run away at night but they would usually be apprehended, sometimes by local people, and returned to the School soon after.

²⁷ This is a pseudonym.

²⁸ This is a pseudonym.

²⁹ This is a pseudonym.

8.163 He said that the threat of punishment hung like a cloud over the boys. It was arbitrarily administered without any supervision either inside or outside the classroom. Br Anatole was given a leather strap on arrival but he got no instruction on its use. He did not confine himself to the use of the strap; he would punish boys with a slap of his open palm, his fist, a stick, or indeed a kick.

8.164 Although the Brothers were given no guidance regarding corporal punishment, Br Malleville,³⁰ the Resident Manager, often complained about the excessive use of corporal punishment and was quite strict on such matters when boys complained to him about excessive beatings. Br Anatole recalled one incident in particular, when Br Malleville approached him and told him he had received a complaint that a boy had been punished for the wrong reasons and he wanted an explanation. Br Anatole described how the boy had been beaten about the legs with a leather strap and made to run around the yard. The boy complained to Br Malleville, who reprimanded him, Br Anatole.

8.165 Br Anatole described another particularly savage beating, when a boy was beaten on the bare buttocks with a leather. The boy was placed over a chair on the stage and beaten in front of other boys by Br Iven. Br Anatole did not himself administer the beating but he was present during it. A former resident who recalled the boy being stripped and beaten recollected that the handle of a sweeping brush had been used to administer the beating.

8.166 Br Anatole said that Br Malleville heard about the beating and, that evening, convened a meeting of the three junior Brothers who had been involved and reprimanded them for what had occurred.

8.167 The other two Brothers implicated, Br Iven and Br Dondre, denied to the Investigation Committee in evidence that this incident ever took place or that they were involved in it.

8.168 Br Anatole informed the Committee that he and his colleagues had inherited from some of the older Brothers the practice of making the boys run around the yard. It was a punishment generally administered by the senior dormitory Brother for absconding. The Brother would stand in the centre, and the boys would form a circle around him and they would be made to run around the yard and would be beaten if they started to tire or to lag behind. In a Garda statement, Br Anatole described it thus:

I can recall the heavy silence punctuated by the rhythm of the boots pounding on the concrete yard as the boys ran around and around, eyes cast down as they ran ... Their faces were cold and emotionless, unsmiling and blank of any recognition. I carry this memory with me still, as I do all the other punishments meted out to boys in our care.

8.169 He described its operation as follows:

Well, the dormitory leader was the man who dictated what was to be happening. I was not a dormitory leader I was an assistant to Br Dondre so a decision to run around the yard was never mine; but if it was done I might be called upon to stand in the corner of the yard and be there to give moral support to the other Brother who was in charge – the Brother stood in the centre of the circle rather like a ring master and the running was done in silence. It was supposed to calm everybody down, I think it did have that effect actually on recollection, there was a sort of a silent running. When it was over the boys usually went off upstairs to bed, it was done late in the evening time.

8.170 As a punishment, however, he stated that he regarded it as pointless and ineffective, 'It was devoid of human dignity, it was humiliating, it was pointless and probably completely ineffective'.

³⁰ This is a pseudonym.

8.171 Another way of punishing was for a boy to be seated in a chair near a football game and to be treated as if he did not exist:

I don't think the intention was to kick footballs directly at the boy it was more or less an act of isolation to humiliate him, it was a form of punishment other than corporal punishment. If somebody did kick a football at him, and that would happen, the ball would bounce off his head or off his chest or something, there would be a big cheer or a bit of a laugh. That again was part of the humiliation of the experience.

8.172 Another punishment was peculiar to the refectory. It involved making the offender kneel in silence during meal times. He would not receive any dinner:

... if they were kneeling on the floor the withdrawal of food would be part of the punishment as well. We learned these things from seeing them done, they were handed down like a code of practice so to speak, which was never questioned or supervised in any way by anybody else.

8.173 Br Anatole said that corporal punishment would be administered for a myriad of offences:

If you were walking behind somebody and they were talking you could take out your leather strap and sort of give them a swipe on the back of the legs or a smack on the backside.

8.174 He would also hit them for failure at lessons:

For example, you asked me for an example, maybe in the classroom I was under pressure to get my Department of Education accreditation so I would be short-tempered at times with pupils who didn't spell words correctly or something. The traditional way at that time was you would give somebody a smack to make sure so they learned it properly.. There was a very crude connection between if you hit somebody they would learn better that way, that was the basic thinking at the time. That was the way I was taught at primary school and I repeated that myself later on as an adult in the Christian Brothers.

8.175 He also beat boys who attempted to jump out of the showers to avoid the sudden changes in temperature, which could go from scalding hot to freezing cold in a matter of seconds. He thought that beating boys for a natural reaction to extremes of temperature seemed particularly cruel.

8.176 He spoke of collective punishment and recalled one incident where a boy stole a Communion wafer. Nobody owned up and the whole School was punished. Collective punishment could take many forms, such as the deprivation of food or being made to run around the yard.

8.177 Yet another occasional punishment was using the fire hose to direct cold water on to boys who had run away.

8.178 The knowledge that there was no parental presence made him feel he had *carte blanche* to punish to a greater extent than he would have done in a national school with active parental involvement. Being able to beat the boys gave him a sense of power. He said, *'The opportunity for use of corporal punishment was much greater in Letterfrack than it would be in the national school'*.

8.179 He apologised for his use of corporal punishment in the School:

My first duty before the Commission is to put an unreserved apology in the record for anyone who was hurt by me in any way. That was regrettably the state of the art at the time in the 60s that these pupils had to be punished, they had to be made to pay for the damage they did in society, reformed and sent back out as productive citizens.

8.180 The Christian Brothers disputed Br Anatole's recollections of Letterfrack. They submitted that written statements made by him following his arrest were inconsistent and contradictory when compared with a document he produced while he was still working in the Institution. They also contended that these statements were self-serving and coloured by his desire to present himself to the court in a sympathetic light in seeking to avoid imprisonment. It suited his purpose, therefore, to portray Letterfrack in the most hostile light. For his part, Br Anatole said that he was not understating his case in his Garda statements. He described how he co-operated with the Gardaí in the investigation and that he was encouraged to write a full account of everything that he thought might be relevant by way of mitigation. He had been through two years of therapy, and a lot of memories had surfaced in the therapeutic situation, which the therapist had encouraged him to keep in journal form.

8.181 Although the Congregation were able to demonstrate inconsistencies between written statements and testimony given by this witness at different times spanning many years, his evidence was generally credible and reliable about life in Letterfrack, and witnesses provided independent confirmation.

Br Iven

8.182 Br Iven worked as a teacher in Letterfrack during the late 1960s and early 1970s. He found Letterfrack to be a lonely place with stressful work and little free time. He told the Committee that he carried a strap, as all Brothers did, but did not remember ever getting any training in its use. Punishment was a matter for his discretion and he punished as the need arose and never felt the need to refer matters up the chain of command. He accepted that the use of the strap was unacceptable by today's standards, but he did not think that it was excessive by the standards of the day. Br Iven, however, qualified this view when he went on to say that Letterfrack was not a normal school and its residents were not normal schoolchildren, implying that normal standards did not apply to them and some excesses were justified.

8.183 He was asked whether he had any personal regrets about punishments he meted out to the boys:

I have regrets in many ways. I have regrets, first of all that I was sent there inadequately trained for the job. Secondly, I didn't know how to handle the situation I was put in. Thirdly, I suppose that with corporal punishment, punishment by the strap – yes, I think with better training, with better facilities, better staffing, we would not have had the need to use as much discipline and corporal as we did. I do have regrets yes.

8.184 His perception that corporal punishment was not overly excessive was said in the context that the level of discipline that was normal at the time in schools was the appropriate standard to apply throughout the day:

You were there 24 hours, seven days a week, so yes, there was a lot more than you would normally have as a teacher at the time, but it wouldn't have been overly excessive.

8.185 He remembered one occasion when a boy attacked him and he just about got the better of him. He felt that it was a test of strength. He was a new Brother and a small man, and the attack was designed to see what the boys could get away with. It left him greatly shaken and showed him that he was not dealing with ordinary 16-year-olds.

8.186 This Brother also confirmed what complainants and other Brothers had said about boys being hosed down for absconding. One complainant had described an incident where two boys had absconded at a time when there was heavy snowfall. They were captured and returned to the school and, according to the witness, put up against a wall, hosed down with fire hoses and made to stand in the freezing cold in their underpants as a form of punishment:

The incident happened during winter. There was snow on the ground. It was easy then to find the pupil. The pupil was brought back to the school and then one particular Brother decided that this was the way he would wash him down after it.

8.187 Br Iven was in his interim period of teacher training during his time in Letterfrack and was due back in Marino to complete his qualification. He said that he did not feel he could report breaches of discipline to the Resident Manager because of a combination of factors, but principally because he was afraid that it could lead to his dismissal from the Congregation which would have meant he could not become a teacher:

I am giving you my honest opinion, no, I didn't feel that I was in a position to report this. It would have been maybe thought as unseemly conduct for me as a Christian Brother to defend myself, maybe turn the other cheek instead, unfortunately, I didn't feel that confident about saying anything.

8.188 This Brother did return to Marino after two and a half years in Letterfrack and a six-month posting to a day school in Dublin; and immediately he had completed his final year of training, he left the Congregation.

Br Dondre

8.189 Br Dondre worked as a teacher in Letterfrack from the 1960s to the early 1970s. He regarded himself as a sort of gaoler who was hated by the inmates of the school. This sometimes bubbled over in the form of attempted assaults on members of staff. The young Brothers were the front line and, if challenged, they had to take decisive action for fear of losing control over the group as a whole:

... we were the front line, we were the people responsible for keeping these kids in an industrial school, in a contained situation, as they called themselves in prison. Some of them would refer to the place as a prison. So we were the front line. We were the people who were sort of the easy targets for all their unhappiness and frustration and the stress and tension, and all the other things they were feeling.

8.190 He said that yard duty was particularly difficult, given the numbers involved and the rough nature of the boys. Fighting, bullying and name calling were constant features of life in the yard, and the Brother in charge would be expected to take action. He felt he was particularly vulnerable because of his small stature.

8.191 Br Dondre said that he was physically assaulted on a number of occasions. On the first occasion, when he was supervising a group of 90 pupils, one boy was cursing at another boy and he called him over to chastise him. As the boy approached, he put up his two fists. Br Dondre put his own fists up and the situation was defused.

8.192 The next occasion involved the same boy, in the dormitory, when he pinned Br Dondre up against a wall and attempted to choke him. He flipped the boy over. Br Anatole came in and asked him if everything was all right.

8.193 On a third occasion, he was threatened by a boy wielding a broken chair. He said he was able to handle that situation because the boy was the same height as him and he removed the chair from him.

8.194 Br Dondre described a fourth occasion as the most serious and upsetting incident. He was verbally chastising a pupil when the boy attacked him with the leg of a chair. Br Dondre picked up a stick and hit him on the head with it. The boy's head was grazed from the blow. The boy dropped and he caught him in a headlock. He got control of the boy and brought him to the nurse who

disinfected the wound on his head. He reported the matter to Br Malleville, who criticised Br Dondre for his inability to keep control and letting the incident occur. He was asked whether he understood Br Malleville's criticism to relate to his loss of temper and he said:

No it wasn't that. It was the fact that the incident happened at all. That I let him get out of control.

- 8.195** He was never given any guidance or direction from Br Malleville or anyone else as to how that control might be maintained. Br Dondre said that he deeply regretted his conduct on that day.
- 8.196** He was not issued with a strap on arrival, but he went to the cobbler and asked him to make one for him because he thought he would need it. He received no guidance as to its use and so would have used his own discretion. He was aware, however, of the Christian Brothers' rules regarding the administration of corporal punishment.
- 8.197** He explained the circumstances in which corporal punishment could be administered in the classroom. The rulebook prohibited the administration of punishment for failure at lessons, but Br Dondre drew a distinction between two types of failure at lessons: the first was failure due to a lack of knowledge, the second was failure due to not having prepared the subject properly. In the former, he would not administer punishment; in the latter, he would. There was a grey area in which the second kind of failure could be regarded as a breach of discipline.
- 8.198** Br Dondre said that he often gave boys 'a clatter' for serious offences. He admitted to kicking boys, beating them with a stick or with his open palm. He said that he regretted using corporal punishment but stressed that it was essential for maintaining order. He felt that the boys had no respect for teachers who did not use it.
- 8.199** Br Dondre agreed with other Brothers that absconding was regarded as a particularly serious offence, and recalled an incident where absconders were punished with a fire hose. It was also punishable by the withdrawal of home leave, head shaving and by being beaten with the strap. It was usually dealt with directly by the Resident Manager.

Br Karel³¹

- 8.200** Br Karel worked in Letterfrack in the early 1970s and had been sent there because the school was experiencing problems. Discipline was poor as a result of low staff levels, and the small number of staff that was there was overworked. Shortly after he arrived, the boys staged a sit-down protest and were only persuaded to go to bed with difficulty. The other Brothers working there told him they were barely able to keep control and there had been assaults on two of them. Bullying was a big problem, with bigger boys regularly trying to impose their will on smaller boys and even on Brothers. He administered corporal punishment with a leather strap which was carried by all of the Brothers and he also used his fists. He confirmed that there was no punishment book in which punishments administered were recorded. He told the Committee that he used the threat of three slaps on the buttocks to deter boys from absconding.
- 8.201** He instituted a number of schemes to try and control the boys and create a positive atmosphere in the School. As a result, he was able to discontinue gradually the use of the leather strap:

The atmosphere changed gradually. Punishment was still there in the normal way, corporal punishment didn't go out until 1982 or 1983. I was able to discard that leather which was the normal way of administering punishment in Letterfrack in that, somewhere in the middle of that period I was there and I never again used it.

³¹ This is a pseudonym.

8.202 Br Karel worked in Letterfrack for the last two years of the Institution, during which time the numbers reduced dramatically. When he arrived, there were 41 boys in the Institution, and when he left in 1974, there were only 11 boys and the School was in the process of closing.³² Even though numbers were that small, violence was still a serious problem in the School.

8.203 Main points arising from respondent evidence

- These witnesses confirmed that violence was a regular feature of life in Letterfrack. It was a means of communication and was a way of gaining status and power. Fear affected the way boys related to Brothers and impaired relationships among the boys themselves.
- Many Brothers considered that the practice of carrying a leather all the time and using it as and when required was normal for the times. They defended this level of corporal punishment by saying that it was no more than was present in many national schools. The crucial point was that Letterfrack was more than just a national school; it was home to the boys who were there. Parents did not carry around leathers or sticks as a matter of course, and that is the standard by which the Brothers should be judged. The Brothers were trained, or were in the course of training, as teachers and it is as teachers that they speak of levels of corporal punishment, not as carers *in loco parentis* to these children. Even today, many of them are not able to see that subjecting children to the constant threat of corporal punishment at the level it was administered in Letterfrack was excessive and unreasonable.
- Brothers gave examples of corporal punishment that were clearly beyond what was acceptable in national schools. Punishment was not confined to slapping on the hand. Brothers used the strap on the buttocks and the bare buttocks. Some Brothers admitted hitting boys with their hands or fists. Implements such as sticks were used. Punishments included marching around the yard, isolation, head shaving and hosing down with cold water.
- Brothers differed as to their knowledge of the rules on corporal punishment, in that some recalled being aware of them whilst others did not. In reality, these Rules were irrelevant in Letterfrack because they were breached so often and without any fear of censure.
- All Brothers who spoke to the Committee confirmed that corporal punishment was a matter of individual discretion and that they received no formal guidance or training on its administration. They administered the punishment themselves and generally did not involve the Resident Manager.
- Trainee Brothers who did so much of the day-to-day running of the School had a strong incentive to maintain the status quo, because taking problems to the Resident Manager might have had repercussions for gaining their qualifications. If they used excessive punishment, the Resident Manager did no more than warn them to avoid recurrences. Losing control of the boys, however, was seen as a serious failing by the Brothers.
- In the absence of accountability or control, either through supervision or the punishment book, excessive and unfair corporal punishment was administered.
- Letterfrack was seen as a challenging and difficult posting by the Brothers and ex-Brothers who testified. Some Brothers admitted that they took out their frustrations on the boys in their care and punished excessively as a result. The system that placed inexperienced or unsuitable Brothers in an environment that was so fundamentally flawed was fraught with danger.

³² See table at paragraph 3.20.

Evidence of former residents

8.204 Complainant witnesses gave evidence from a perspective that was necessarily different from respondents. Their testimony focused on some major themes as follows:

- Physical punishment was pervasive; there was no way of avoiding it and it was the response of first resort for any problem that arose.
- There was an extraordinary variety of methods of inflicting pain and physical discomfort.
- The circumstances in which punishment was inflicted were many and varied, ranging from serious offences to trivial matters and sometimes for no reason at all.
- Life in Letterfrack was lived in a climate of fear.

Public punishments

8.205 Complainant and respondent witnesses agreed that boys were sometimes punished in public, when other boys were formally assembled to witness the event with the intention that they should learn something from the occasion. Br Francois had a 'vague recollection' of one such incident:

I remember them being lined up, I don't know what room, was it the refectory or something, they were lined up in a line and slapped as far as I remember, in front of the rest of the school.

8.206 A former resident described the circumstances of a public beating which was acknowledged as having occurred by Br Anatole and which was dealt with in his evidence above:

This guy, the fellow I am talking about Alan³³ what he done was a guy sitting on the top, he was sitting on the chair and he was having a hair cut. The Brother left the thing for cutting your hair down and when he went the guy went up and he shaved the back of the guy's head quickly as a joke, and your man had a big lump missing out of his hair. So when the Brother came back he seen this and he was really mad, and he asked who done it. Eventually through a lot of, you know, questions and threatening, battering him, whatever, he said it was so and so that done it. That is how he come to be punished for that ... I can't remember if he said, "listen I done it", but the guy said "it was Alan who done it". So he got done and his punishment was on the stage in front of everyone.

8.207 Br Anatole recalled that this incident came to the attention of the Superior, Br Malleville, who severely reprimanded him and the other Brothers who took part:

It was around supper time. He brought us into the parlour, he was very angry and he said that such a thing was never to happen again ... That any boy was to be beaten on the backside over a chair, on the stage in the hall ... I think it was the sheer brutality of it and the excessive nature of it, it was way outside the boundaries of what Br Malleville considered legitimate corporal punishment. It was there in the collective consciousness of us as Brothers in Letterfrack that these methods that you are putting to me one after the other, that these were handed down progressively from one year to the next. When new Brothers came on the scene that's how we found out that this was the way things were done here. We never discussed them in any way it was just here we go, run around the yard, give somebody a kick in the backside or whatever. It was just done like that depending on how you felt at that particular time.

8.208 There was no record in the Christian Brothers' discovery of this reprimand or of the circumstances that gave rise to it.

³³ This is a pseudonym.

8.209 Another former resident remembered the occasion when this boy was beaten:

...[he] was called up for his punishment on the stage, and he was battered and beaten by Br Iven in front of – we all had to sit in these chairs as if you were watching a play on the stage and Br Iven battered him, beat him, lashed him, punched him and kicked him and because he wasn't getting any satisfaction, he couldn't make him cry, he started to take off his collar and take his habit down or whatever you call them, and he started to lash him, you know, with his fists and stuff. It seemed like it went on for a long, long time and we had to sit there and watch this.

8.210 The Brother who was identified as having given this extreme beating denied involvement. He said, 'Not only do I not remember it but that certainly wouldn't have happened'.

8.211 Notwithstanding the disapproving attitude of the Superior, there were other public beatings. One witness said:

There was different Brothers that used to do it. It was a sort of – it wasn't always on the stage it could be just up in a corner and made to, everybody silent while somebody was getting punished and you would be just staring ... We used to have a little TV up the front and there was a stage, you know, there was chairs where we would just sit around. If it was raining you would hang about here or if it was cold. This is where things used to happen ... Sometimes they would have a list of people who had done things and the punishment time was in the evening. Or, like, in the dormitory they'd have names, you would be called out, so and so, come up here. At the end of the dormitory where a room was they would carry out punishments there. It could be in the yard, there was a big yard with four walls, you know. You were lined up like soldiers and your name was called out ... There was other Brothers who done a lot of punishments too, but this is a guy I have in my mind who I seen doing things and has done things to me. There was another guy Telfour, I seen him using the special branches or sticks that bend.

8.212 Although boys might not always be formally assembled, the public nature of beatings administered where all the boys were assembled had a similar effect. This was particularly true at night time, when boys were punished in the washroom adjacent to the dormitories. One witness described a severe beating he received for absconding. The Manager turned off the radio that was playing in the dormitory and invited the rest of the boys who were in their beds to 'now listen to some music' as he brought the boy out to be beaten. His screams were heard throughout the dormitory.

8.213 It was disturbing to hear other boys being beaten. As one witness said, 'you nearly preferred to get it yourself because listening to somebody getting bashed, in a sense it is worse than getting it yourself'.

8.214 • **Public punishment increased the ordeal for the person being punished and had a frightening impact on the boys watching or listening. Such spectacles should have had no place in a facility dedicated to the care of children.**

Varieties of punishment

8.215 On one occasion, a boy trying to escape was caught in one of the fields belonging to the School and brought back. He was given a severe beating and was then subjected to two extra punishments that required considerable ingenuity. He first described the beating:

I was told to take down my pants and bend over. Well, I didn't actually get to bend over myself, he just grabbed the back of my neck and pulled me down and started to lay into me ... All the rest of the boys had gone off to work in the afternoon and there was just me and him. Now I have a vague recollection of another Brother being around, but I couldn't swear to it.

8.216 He then said that he was brought to the boot-makers and was given extra large boots:

At the time I was pretty small. The boots, it was like having two barges on your feet. Then he frog-marched me up to the farmyard where some of the boys were up there. They were piling silage, at the time I thought it was only grass, but I got the technical term later; into this big silo pit and I was made to get into it and walk around in circles with these boots. It would have been bad enough walking around with ordinary boots, because every time you stepped, you would go down, but the big boots, and when the boys had a rest, I had to keep going.

8.217 Finally, he described how he was isolated by being made to stand at the refectory wall while boys played football around him and where he could be struck by the ball:

Up close to the wall, but I wasn't allowed to lift my hands up. If I lifted my hands up – I didn't realise he could run so fast in skirts – the boys would hit the ball. Some hit me on the leg, the backside, the back, quite a few on the head, the back of the head and bang and that went on for about two weeks. Exactly how long, I don't know. I didn't play at all, after church in the morning, before we went to school, before lunch and after lunch, before dinner, after dinner, I was there all the time.

8.218 This treatment went on for a number of weeks until he was relieved of the obligation by another Brother:

Shortly afterwards, the boys came back from – the ones that were on holidays came back, and I don't know this Brother's name, but he came back around the same time, so I assumed that he had been on holidays too, but he actually left the school shortly afterwards. He saw me standing there in my extra large boots and I was always bleeding when I was at the wall and he asked me what I was doing? I said, oh, I ran away. He took me down between the refectory and the stairway and the library, there is a little alcove that they used for first aid. He took me in there and cleaned me up and looked at my boots. He said, they are a bit big for you and sent me up to the bootmakers to get a normal size. I couldn't believe it I could actually lift my feet off the ground. But Br Noreis,³⁴ well, he more or less asked me, you know, what are you doing and I pointed to the other Brother and said, that Brother told me to leave the wall. He wasn't too pleased, but I got the impression that there wasn't anything he could do about it.

8.219 The same witness described how he was accused of causing damage by failing to turn off an iron while he was working in the tailor shop. He had not been the last person to use the iron because he had given it to another boy when he had finished his work. Subsequently, smoke was seen to be coming out of the shop because the iron had been left turned on and burned through the ironing cover. That evening, instead of going to the cinema, the boys were summoned by the Disciplinarian to ascertain who had left the iron on. Because the witness had been ironing, he was the prime suspect, and the Disciplinarian organised a mock trial in which he was the defendant and the Brother the Judge. The Brother appointed counsel for the defence and prosecution. He told the boys that the witness would not be punished if found guilty. The trial went on for a couple of hours and the witness found the questioning so hurtful that he broke down crying. The Disciplinarian took this as an indication of guilt and the witness was severely beaten. He said:

That was enough for him to convict me; I was guilty. If I wasn't guilty, why was I crying? Everyone went off to bed. I was going off to bed and I was called back and flogged. Before he did it, I said, "but you promised I wouldn't get flogged for the fire". He said, "you are not being flogged for the fire. You are being punished because you told a lie".. So heads he wins, tails I lose.

³⁴ This is a pseudonym.

8.220 Another variety of punishment which was confirmed by individual respondents was that boys were required to run around the yard as punishment. Br Michel described it thus:

That did happen. What I can remember was if a boy, if a mature chap ran away, absconded, the Manager would say "give him a while running around the yard." It happened during break times it didn't go on for terribly long, a few days maybe ... it would be during play time and there was always a Brother in the yard during playtime, therefore he would be supervised. The rest of the students would be there as well.

8.221 A witness described how one Brother imposed a punishment on a group of boys, who were due to go swimming, because one misbehaved:

On the way across the yard somebody booed and when we all got to the door to lead up to the dormitory he asked who booed, nobody would own up to who booed so he sent us across to the boot room, which was on the other side of the yard and we had to take off our sandals at the time, because it was the summertime, and put on our Wellingtons. We were made to run around the yard, everybody ran around the yard until we could run no more. That was it we just left – no swimming.

8.222 Another witness described how Br Noreis directed boys to write down the names of those who engaged in sexual activity, and punished them as a group, if sufficient information was not given, by depriving them of the Saturday night film:

Everyone got a sheet of paper and a pencil and we were told to write down if we knew of any boys who had been, shall we say, sexually active with any other boy. Well, I always wrote the same thing down; I don't know what you mean. This always went on a Saturday night. You always missed out on the cinema, because that was the one day that we had a movie. After all these boys had done whatever writing they were doing the paper was collected and we were all sent off to the dormitories, and for the rest of the night you could hear the screaming where boys who had misbehaved were dragged down in their night clothes and flogged by Br Noreis. That went on quite often.

8.223 Another witness had his head shaved and was 'sent to Coventry' for a period that was to end when his hair grew back:

what they decided to do instead of giving me a beating, they decided to cut all my hair off and keep all the other kids from speaking to me until it was grown back, and that is the way I remember Letterfrack.

8.224 The witness described how the other boys treated him:

They weren't allowed to speak to me, as I say, until my hair grew back, and then when I would be walking around the yard and that, the ball would be kicked – if they were playing football, the ball would be kicked at me, I would be ducking. I was never hurt by a ball or anything like that.

8.225 This lasted until his hair grew: '*I don't know how long but it felt like an awful long time*'.

8.226 Another former resident explained:

There was two things down there that you had to be aware of, was the bare and the baldier. The baldier was getting your hair cut off and getting it on the bare was getting it on the bare bum.

8.227 Punishments included beating with a leather on the bare buttocks. Brothers acknowledged that this happened, as is detailed in the section on respondent evidence. One respondent who gave evidence, however, did not recall beating boys on the bare buttocks, and conceded only that when

he was beating a boy in a dormitory the latter's nightshirt might have ridden up, but the beating *'wasn't on his bare buttocks to my knowledge'*. He was referred to a statement he made to the Gardaí, in which he referred to his use of the leather:

Yes, I did in class and in the yard. I used it mostly on the hand. I used it twice on the bare backside of a fella that I caught going into another fella's bed at nights. I did not feel great about this beating it was part of the reason I left because I felt I was becoming brutalised.

8.228 The Brother denied that he used the word 'bare' in the statement he made to the Gardaí, stating that he did not read back over his statement before signing it.

8.229 Another witness expanded:

Out to the wash hall that was a dreaded thing. There was a term there; you could get it on the bare. What it meant was you would have to pull your nightshirt up, bend over and it would be a cane or the leather strap and you would get it heftily on the bottom. You would suffer from it and it would be violent, there is no other way you could describe it. That's what happened to me. I got it on the bare out there. You expected it once you got out there, lights out and into the wash hall. This is what you are going to get and this is what I got. I got it pretty violent out there.

8.230 Beating on the bare buttocks was not confined to the most serious offences, and one witness said it happened to him because he was talking in the dormitory at night.

8.231 Residents remembered head shaving and isolation as part of the punishment for absconding. One said:

They didn't get very far. One chap ... he got to Athlone. The police arrested him and brought him back. When you were brought back they cut all the hair off you and isolated you.

8.232 Another said:

For instance, if the boys ran away they stood them up against the wall, cut all their hair off, shaved it and nobody could talk to them.

8.233 Respondent witnesses confirmed this. Br Dondre said that it was a recognised punishment and it was done in order to stigmatise them. Br Francois had a similar recollection. He saw it done and presumed it was a *'badge of disgrace'*.

8.234 In its Submission, the Congregation accepted that boys' heads were shaved as a punishment:

It would appear that this was a punishment which was confined to absconders though the Congregation acknowledges that it was an unacceptable form of punishment and deeply regrets that any boy's head was shaved in this way.

8.235 Another form of punishment that was not in dispute was hosing boys with cold water. A resident in the 1950s said that Br Sorel punished bed-wetters by hosing them down. A similar punishment was described in the late 1960s for boys who had tried to abscond. Respondents confirmed this evidence. Br Sorel said that he did so for hygiene reasons, but he accepted that other Brothers used it as a punishment and that it was totally wrong. Responding to the suggestion that people were brought down and hosed as a punishment, not for the purposes of hygiene but as a specific punishment, he said:

I think that was true in other case with some other Brothers, I think that was done as a punishment. I think it was totally wrong ... Looking back, the whole thing was horrific for me and I am sure it was for the boys.

8.236 Br Anatole accepted that absconders were still being hosed down in his time, the late 1960s:

If a boy ran away. It hasn't come up so far in the question. It was one of the routine punishments; if a boy ran away he might be hosed down in the shower room. There was a fire hose rolled up against the wall.

8.237 Br Dondre saw it happen once and did not approve of its use:

The fire hose, I only ever saw it being used once. There were a couple of boys absconded and they were brought back. That night Br Anatole came to the dormitory and he took the two boys from the dormitory and put them into their bathing togs, they were taken from the dormitory and I went with them. I didn't know what he was going to do; I didn't know where he was bringing them. I followed them down to the yard, down the side of the kitchen and he took the fire hose off the wall and he hosed the two boys down with the fire hose. Then he gave it to me to continue on and I turned it off.

8.238 Br Iven also recalled an incident when absconders were hosed down when they were brought back to Letterfrack.

The inevitability of punishment

8.239 It was impossible to avoid punishment. One witness said, *'If one of these guys got in a bad humour that was it. You were standing in the roadway, that was it'*. Another resident was asked whether a boy could avoid beatings. He replied, *'Not really, you couldn't. Not in Letterfrack, you couldn't. Not from certain Brothers, you could not'*.

8.240 A witness who was resident from the late 1940s to the early 1950s described a severe beating he received. He worked in the generator room, helping the lay operator. One of his jobs was to go down to the generator room in the early hours to divert the electrical energy created by the turbine to the battery. The night watchman used to wake him for this purpose but on this occasion he was late in doing so, as a result of which the electricity was not diverted at the right time. The Brother in charge of the generator discovered the situation and punished the boy, who did not blame the night watchman because he did not want to get him into trouble. The Brother gave him a severe beating with a stick. When the lay operator saw the boy's condition after the beating he brought him up to the Manager in the monastery and told him that if it ever happened again he would go to the Gardaí:

He said first of all he'd inform the local police and then he'd get the cruelty man in if it ever happened again. It never happened again from Br Lafayette³⁵ ... He said he would see to it, he'd take it in hand.

Absconding

8.241 Brothers and complainants confirmed that boys who ran away from the Institution were dealt with severely once caught. Absconding had to be reported to the Department of Education, and the Gardaí were often called on to assist in finding the child.

8.242 A research paper commissioned by the Congregation in 2001 contains an analysis of the number of abscondings between 1959 and 1972 and the ages of the boys when they absconded.

³⁵ This is a pseudonym.

8.243 The following table illustrates the number of pupils, their ages and when they absconded:³⁶

Year	Number of pupils absconding	Age(s)
1959	1	11
1960	1	13
1961	1	12
1963	2	10; 12
1964	1	12
1965	1	11
1966	5	8; 10; 12; 13; 14
1967	6	13; 13; 13; 13; 13; 14
1968	4	10; 11; 12; 14
1969	2	14; 14
1970	4	11; 12; 12; 13
1971	2	9; 10
1972	2	13; 14
Total	32	

8.244 The detail contained in this list does not match the information in the Department of Education's Annual Report entries. In 1959, six boys absconded from the School and did a considerable amount of damage to property and were removed after special court on 10th January 1959 to Daingean Reformatory. In 1959, the Visitor noted that 'Since Christmas, 11 boys ran away at different times. Br Malleville has to take the car and follow them or that he got word from the Guards that they had been captured and that he had to collect them and sometimes was not home with them until 1.30 a.m'. What is very evident is the increasing level of absconding, particularly from the mid-1960s onwards.

8.245 What was clear from this analysis was that the official records did not reflect the actual number of boys who ran away from Letterfrack and who were severely punished for so doing.

8.246 In 1967, the Visitor noted that, although conditions had improved in Letterfrack, absconding was a serious problem:

The boys can never be left on their own for despite the efforts to make the school a home for them the boys always regard the school as a place of detention and are liable to run away at any time.

8.247 This Visitor recognised the fundamental problem of removing boys from their home and friends and expecting them to adjust to a completely alien lifestyle and environment. The response of the authorities was punitive and never addressed the reasons why the boys had run away in the first place.

8.248 The high level of absconding should have alerted the management to question the way in which Letterfrack provided care to the children sent there, but this does not appear to have happened.

³⁶ This information is taken from a report compiled for the Christian Brothers by Michael Bruton in relation to Letterfrack in 2001.

Bed-wetting

8.249 In its Opening Statement, the Congregation stated:

Unfortunately, the boys could have been the objects of ridicule by their peers being labelled “slashers” ... No living Brother who was in Letterfrack in the period under review recalls that there was ever any punishment meted out to a boy for bed-wetting.

8.250 However, during the private hearings, Br Sorel, who was present during the 1940s and 1950s, admitted to punishing boys for bed-wetting. He stated that:

That was one of the worst and soiling the bed. This is the thing that used to break my heart in the morning when I came down to the dormitory, they had Macintosh sheets, large ones on the bed, and then they had the ordinary sheets over the Macintosh sheet, you would find three or four of the lads would not alone wet the bed but soil the bed. I was really tearing my hair out at that stage.

8.251 He continued:

It was a problem every morning and I used to detest it. I felt like running away myself several times, having to face it coming down in the morning. It was terrible, the stench and the smell.

8.252 He used to try and deal with the problem himself, but if it was not possible the boys had to take their mattress down to the yard, or take their sheets to the laundry.

8.253 As a result of this evidence in its Final Submission the Congregation stated:

It is accepted that boys were, on isolated occasions during this period, punished for this problem though it does not appear that such punishment was a regular or routine practice within Letterfrack.

8.254 They also accept that bed-wetters could have been dealt with more sensitively and that boys were required to organise the cleaning of their sheets themselves.

8.255 Complainants testified that there was a practice of punishing boys who wet their beds. A former resident, who was in Letterfrack in the late 1960s, described how he was slapped for wetting the bed:

And if you wet the bed, you got a smack. They would know the bed-wetters from the rest of them. They would check their beds all the time. They would just walk by and they would whip your blankets off, and if the bed was stained you would get a smack.

8.256 A number of former residents told the Investigation Committee how they started to wet the bed in Letterfrack. One pupil described how he started to wet the bed in the School, a problem that continued well into adult life. He said that, in the mornings, his sheets and mattress would be thrown on the floor. He recounted how he was sometimes made to wrap the sheets around him in order, as he saw it, to degrade him. He would be made to take the sheets to the yard while all the while the other boys would be laughing at him. Although he received the odd slap for bed-wetting he said there was no punishment as such, and what he feared most was the humiliation.

8.257 One former pupil said:

lads that wet the bed as well they were made take the mattress down in the morning, carry them around the yard on their back and then put them on the rails in front of the shops they had in the school. There was a row of shops all the way along; the bakers, the cobblers and the tailors, and there was big railings and they had to put the mattresses up there to dry out. It was embarrassing like, you know.

- 8.258**
- **Bed-wetting and soiling showed the extreme emotional disturbance suffered by many children in Letterfrack. Evidence from complainants about this problem was that it developed after they had come to Letterfrack and was not a pre-existing condition.**
 - **Although much of the complainants' evidence was confirmed in general terms by respondents' evidence, the particular cruelty of the punishment emerged in the testimony of individual complainants. Punishments described by Brothers or ex-Brothers, often in exculpatory or limiting terms, failed to reflect the pain, fear, helplessness and vulnerability that resulted.**

The Congregation's response to allegations of physical abuse in Letterfrack

8.259 In its Opening Statement, the Congregation accepted that there had been lapses by individual Brothers and that children had been physically abused in Letterfrack. They pointed out, however, that corporal punishment was an accepted teaching tool during the period under investigation, and that the children who were sent to Letterfrack could not be regarded as a random sample of the school-going population. They stated that many had been confined to the School by the courts for breaches of the criminal law, and others were committed because their parents did not exercise proper care. Many were unaccustomed to parental discipline. In circumstances where there were a large number of children and a small number of staff, the maintenance of discipline was essential.

8.260 The Congregation stated that there are no surviving punishment books for the School, although they believe that at one stage they did exist.

8.261 The Congregation argued that their records show that the rules governing punishment were adhered to and that physical abusers were removed from the school when they were discovered. They summarised their position as follows:

- (a) The recommendation given was that each Brother was to reduce corporal punishment to a minimum in his class.
- (b) It was clearly stated that corporal punishment was not to be used for failure at lessons or during the religious instruction class.
- (c) Constant emphasis was laid on ensuring that proper comportment, gravity, and propriety were observed in the administration of corporal punishment.
- (d) Other forms of disapproval, from sarcasm to pushing a child away, were forbidden.
- (e) The only instrument of punishment authorised was the leather strap, and punishment could only be administered on the hand.
- (f) The authorized leather strap was to be kept in the teacher's desk in the classroom.

8.262 In its Closing Submission, the Congregation stated:

In light of all of the evidence, including the evidence of the respondents, it is accepted by the Congregation that, unfortunately there were incidents of excessive physical punishment.

However it would appear that these were isolated incidents and it is submitted that the evidence does not support a finding that excessive severe punishment was routine or prevalent during the relevant period. However it is accepted that the evidence suggested that the regime of physical punishment in the 1940s was somewhat more severe than in the period subsequent to that when there were improvements in the general regime.

- 8.263
- The evidence of former residents about the punishment regime in Letterfrack was substantially confirmed by respondent witnesses, and there was little dispute as to the punishments that were administered.
 - There were fewer areas of dispute as between complainant and respondent witnesses than there were between complainants and the Congregation of the Christian Brothers. The Congregation acknowledged that there had been breaches of the rules as to corporal punishment, in respect of which they were apologetic, but adhered to the position that excesses were not the norm and that the regime, when considered in the proper historical context, was not an abusive one.
 - Punishment that was excessive, arbitrary, uncontrolled and pervasive had an impact that was not limited to the particular incident or the particular recipient, but created a climate of fear and distrust throughout the Institution. The Congregation failed to consider the full extent and long-term impact of the corporal punishment regime in Letterfrack when coming to the conclusion outlined in its Final Submission.

Conclusions on physical abuse

- 8.264
1. Corporal punishment in Letterfrack was severe, excessive and pervasive, and created a climate of fear.
 2. Corporal punishment was the primary method of control. It was used to express power and status and practically became a means of communication between Brothers and boys, and among the boys themselves.
 3. It was impossible to avoid punishment, because it was frequently capricious, unfair and inconsistent.
 4. Formal public punishments, and punishments within sight or hearing of others, left a deep and lasting impression on those present. Witnesses were still troubled by memories of seeing and hearing other boys being beaten.
 5. The lack of supervision and control allowed Brothers to devise unusual punishments and there were sadistic elements to some of them.
 6. The rules on corporal punishment were disregarded and no punishment book was kept, which meant that Brothers were not made accountable for the punishments they administered.
 7. The Congregation did not carry out proper investigations of cases of physical abuse. It did not impose sanctions on Brothers who were guilty of brutal assaults. It did not seek to enforce either the Department's or its own rules that governed corporal punishment.
 8. The Department of Education was at fault in failing to ensure that the statutory punishment book was properly maintained and reviewed at every Inspection.
 9. The Department was also at fault, in the one documented case that came to its attention, when it accepted an implausible explanation that was contrary to the information the Inspector had been given.
 10. In dealing with cases of excessive punishment, protection of the boys was not a priority for the Congregation and, because the Department left supervision and control entirely to local management the children were left without protection.

Sexual abuse in Letterfrack

Introduction

- 8.265** The recorded information about sexual abuse in Letterfrack during the relevant period can be outlined as follows.
- 8.266** Br Dax spent 14 years working in Letterfrack over two periods between the early 1960s and the mid-1970s. He pleaded guilty to sample charges of indecent assault and buggery of boys in Letterfrack. He was sentenced to terms of imprisonment. Four of the victims for the criminal prosecutions also gave evidence to this Committee. Br Dax remains a member of the Congregation.
- 8.267** Br Anatole was a member of the Congregation for over 20 years, until he applied for and was granted a dispensation from his vows in the early 1980s. He pleaded guilty to sample counts of indecent assault in respect of three boys during his period in Letterfrack. He received a suspended sentence.

Documented cases

Br Piperel

- 8.268** The disclosed documents record allegations in the 1930s that a Brother was engaging in sexual misconduct with boys and is an example of how such a complaint was handled.
- 8.269** The Provincial received an anonymous letter of accusation from 'a friend of the school'. How he responded is not recorded but, as appears below, he may have passed it to a deputy to follow up. A second letter from the same source galvanised him into action. On the day he received it, he sent the Brother against whom the allegations had been made a typewritten transcript and requested an urgent response. The letter writer asked the Provincial to change this Brother for the sake of the morals of the boys:

I wrote just two weeks ago telling you that something was happening in the school with the Brother ... it has come to my notice that some of the boys were looking through the partition ... and saw a boy on his lap, etc. which has caused a great comment. I would not like it to get around outside. I believe this is not the first time.

- 8.270** The Provincial did not conceal his disquiet. Having set out a transcription of the anonymous letter, he wrote to Br Piperel:

These recurring warnings are causing me grave anxiety. Taken in connection with what did happen between you and boys on a previous occasion there is quite justifiable cause for all my anxiety.

Has anything wrong, such as is described in the above letter, taken place between you and a boy, or boys? The matter is so grave, and is fraught with such serious consequences to you, to the Institution and to the Congregation, that I require you to be very open and candid with me. Please let me have a letter from you by return.

- 8.271** In the course of a three-page, handwritten letter, Br Piperel set out his defence. He began by recalling that a Visitor had mentioned the matter to him previously and that it was only when the Visitor had left that he remembered the occasion. The inference was that, following receipt of the first letter, the Provincial asked the Visitor to raise the matter with Br Piperel in Letterfrack, and the latter had denied any knowledge of it.
- 8.272** His explanation was that, three weeks previously, one of the boys in the School brought him a message from the Gardaí in Letterfrack village:

While I was wording a reply the boy remained in the room, and as I wanted him to understand the message he was quite close to me while I was writing. After finishing I told the boy to re-arrange the desks, which were out of order after the Drawing. All this took only about seven or eight minutes ...

After dinner I met this same boy and he brought with him another boy whom he stated was calling him names because he was doing messages for me to-day. Although the door of the schoolroom was open the boy looked through the partition while I was writing the message. I asked him why he called the boy names and he stated he only did that to get the other boy into a row. He then stated that he had been quite mistaken and I punished him. Both boys were emphatic about anything having happened. I can understand other boys exaggerating on this and probably making some statement to some individual in the premises.

8.273 Br Piperel claimed that one of the lay staff in the School had a motive for having him removed from the Institution and would have been pleased to get him into trouble, thereby implying that he was the anonymous friend of the School who had written to the Provincial.

8.274 The Brother's reply should have given rise to even greater concern on the part of the Provincial, but instead it seems to have been taken as a complete refutation of the charges of impropriety. The mystery in the case was how the letter of response could have given any reassurance.

8.275 At the time of the complaint, Br Piperel had been in Letterfrack for some eight years and he continued his career there for another four years. Thereafter, he served in three further industrial schools over a 10-year period. The records contained complaints about the Brother's work and attitude in these institutions but did not record incidents of sexual impropriety. His last posting was to a day school in Cork in the 1950s, where his career as a teacher came to a dramatic end as a result of a complaint.

8.276 This matter came to the attention of the School when an influential medical specialist told the Superior that a colleague was troubled because his nine-year-old daughter was being accompanied home from school by Br Piperel, who would wait near the School for her. The girl's father had spoken to the Brother but he maintained that he was not doing anything wrong. The nuns in the School, a local teacher and parents were also concerned about the situation, which was not confined to this particular child. The doctor told the Superior that the girl's father was going to report the matter to the Gardaí if the situation continued, and the Superior sought an immediate transfer, which was granted. Br Piperel remained in the Congregation until his death nine years later.

8.277 In their Opening Statement, the Christian Brothers recorded the facts about this Brother in summary form, noting that he 'was given the opportunity to explain himself and give his interpretation of what happened'. They commented:

It is not clear why Br Piperel was moved around from institution to institution despite being a danger to the boys. There is no detailed account to indicate what discussion took place about the matter, nor any indication as to why such a decision was taken.

8.278 This Brother had a history of improper behaviour towards boys. The Provincial took the anonymous complaint seriously and he behaved appropriately in expressing his anxiety and urgently seeking a response from the Brother. The records did not indicate whether the Provincial notified the manager of any school to which he was subsequently posted.

8.279 Br Piperel was one of three Brothers mentioned by an ex-resident of Letterfrack, Noah Kitterick, who wrote to the Provincial of the Order in 1953 alleging serious sexual and physical abuse.

Notwithstanding the information the Congregation had, which should have alerted them that the allegations of Mr Kitterick were consistent with this Brother's history, no acknowledgement or investigation of Mr Kitterick's complaints was made. It was asserted by the Congregation that the failure to deal with Mr Kitterick's allegations was because of ignorance that such behaviour could possibly have occurred. However, the documented records make such an assertion implausible.

8.280 It is significant that this anonymous letter writer did not feel able to speak to the Resident Manager, Br Troyes, who was in charge during two other serious episodes of sexual abuse in Letterfrack.

- 8.281**
- **The explanation offered by the Brother was entirely unsatisfactory.**
 - **The Provincial's conduct put the interests of the Congregation, the Institution and the Brother ahead of the welfare of the boys, which demanded that the issue of sexual abuse be confronted.**
 - **The Congregation's submission that 'it is not clear why Br Piperel was moved around from institution to institution despite being a danger to boys' was an inadequate response to a serious lapse on the part of the Leadership at the time. Br Piperel was not the only Brother transferred in such manner and circumstances.**

Mr Russel³⁷

8.282 In 1939 the Provincial again had to deal with a case of sexual misconduct, this time involving an ex-pupil who was subsequently employed in the School and was in charge of some of the boys. On 20th July 1939, Br Leveret, the Disciplinarian in Letterfrack, wrote to the Provincial, Br Corben, complaining about the sexual activities of Mr Russel:

You may remember when you called to Letterfrack some time ago my drawing your attention to improper conduct carried on between the young man ... Since your visit, the individual concerned has repeated this misconduct and the attention of the Superior was directed to the matter by the Sub Superior. The latter incident happened towards the end of May. Since then no action has been taken to have the fellow removed.

I am now relieving my conscience by again bringing the matter under your notice. If there be a repetition of the misconduct I shall feel that I did my part in trying to have things put right. I now consider that I am no longer obliged to make any further representation on the matter.

8.283 The Provincial wrote to the Resident Manager, Br Troyes, on 23rd July 1939 to ascertain what was going on:

You will remember that when you were here some months ago I spoke to you about the undesirability of keeping [Mr Russel]—in your employment. You told me that though he had been admittedly implicated in immoral practices with the boys he was now reformed. I have quite recently been informed that he has since reverted to his immoral conduct and that a complaint to this effect was made to you last May. I shall be thankful if you will kindly let me have the particulars of the charge that was made against Russel and to what extent, if any, you found he was guilty.

8.284 The Sub-Superior, Br Vernay, replied on behalf of the Superior on 25th July 1939:

I have known Russel for upwards of seven years and I know that whilst he was in the school as a pupil and that whilst he was out he bore an unblemished character all the time. He has possibly been guilty of a misdemeanour in his contact with the boys but this lapse would be due to an inadvertence rather than any serious notion of guilt on his part or on the part of the boys. The whole thing seems much exaggerated and points to a

³⁷ This is a pseudonym.

campaign against Russel rather than to a desire to correct an evil. Russel since being warned of the seriousness of the position, has become a member of the Sodality and was at Holy Communion on the first Sunday of the present month, Sodality Sunday.

8.285 The Provincial replied to the Resident Manager on 25th July 1939:

I am glad to hear that you investigated the charge that was made against Russel, and that you have given him a serious warning with the threat of dismissal in case that misconduct would be proved against him. I dare say the action you have taken will have a salutary effect upon him. It is good that he is in the Men's Sodality and frequents the Sacraments. Let us hope that with such safeguards and with the grace of God he will not again commit himself. We cannot be too particular about the character and conduct of the people we have in our employment, especially in our institutions.

8.286 The Russel episode became known outside the School, and the Auxiliary Bishop of Tuam, Dr Walsh, wrote to the Provincial, Br Corben, suggesting a Visitation. The complaint was brought to the attention of Br Troyes, the Superior, who wrote to Br Corben on 25th September 1939:

The matter you refer to was inquired into and vehemently denied. At the inquiry Mr Russel was told, that if ever again, there was a complaint and that it was proved to have foundation, it would mean instant dismissal for him. He goes to the Sacraments and is a member of the Men's Sodality. I am satisfied that there has been no cause of complaint. His conduct and the company he keeps about the locality give no cause for anxiety.

I was pained to get the complaint in the manner I got it and annoyed that you should get this trouble. The complainant did not mention it to the Superior but talked about it to others. After all if it were a serious breach of conduct, it is not a matter for public talk. I have never failed to investigate a charge made against an employee or a boy. I am afraid the accuser has an axe to grind in this affair. If he had a difference, as he had with [Mr Russel] and the latter said things to him or of him, he ought not to keep up deliberately showing his spleen as this has been done in many ways. I am afraid the rules of charity and justice have been out stepped. I am satisfied, [Mr Russel] is conducting himself in a proper manner.

8.287 On the same day, 25th September 1939, a member of the Christian Brothers Provincialate had a meeting with Bishop Walsh and noted in a memorandum:

He told me that he had complaints about some immoral practices carried on by [Russel] in Letterfrack with some of the boys in the institution. This he said was reported to him by outsiders and was talked of freely by people who lived in the vicinity of Letterfrack. He (the Bishop) was very disturbed by this information and wished to have it investigated at once.

I told his Lordship that we had already investigated these regrettable incidents and I showed him the correspondence, which passed between the Superior of Letterfrack and the Br Provincial on the subject. He was satisfied that the matter was already taken up and thanked me for attending so promptly to the matter. He however expressed a desire that the Visitation should be held in Letterfrack as soon as possible and asked me when it could be done. I promised him that it would be done before the end of October. This satisfied him... he wished however that this question should be thoroughly gone into at the Visitation, and that if there was evidence of Russel having reverted to his malpractices that he be sent away. I promised that this should be done.

8.288 The Provincial, Br Corben, carried out the Visitation between 12th and 16th October 1939. He investigated the allegations against Mr Russel and satisfied himself that they were true. He directed the Resident Manager to dismiss Mr Russel and the latter did so with the greatest reluctance. His Visitation Report stated:

A short time before the Visitation the Auxiliary Bishop, Most Rev. Dr. Walsh had written to me to say that he had been informed that [Mr Russel] had been carrying on immoral practices with some of the boys. On investigation I found that such was the case, and that this man, who is an ex-pupil of the school, was not only corrupting the morals of the boys but was trying to undermine their Faith. I had on two previous occasions within the past six months told the Superior of complaints of this nature that reached me from the Brothers but he still kept him in his employment. Even now it is with reluctance he carries out my direction to dismiss this man. The Superior adopts a very stupid attitude in matters of this kind.

8.289 The Superior was extremely reluctant to dismiss the employee, notwithstanding the volume of complaints or indeed the weight of evidence against him. The Superior was holding to the view that, although the employee had been guilty of certain previous misconduct, nevertheless he was a reformed character and was not guilty of further wrong.

8.290 In its Opening Statement the Congregation cited this incident for the purpose of showing that this and two other cases involving lay workers were dealt with in an appropriate manner:

These cases demonstrate that the management was very aware of the need to protect the young people from sexual exploitation. It should be noted that such complaints seem to refer solely to the late 1930s and it does not seem that such complaints were widespread.

- 8.291**
- **The Superior maintained an obstinate refusal to acknowledge the misconduct of the employee, even when faced with strong findings of guilt made by the Provincial. The protection of the employee was placed ahead of the interests of the children.**
 - **Immediate action to remove the employee was required, and the inadequate response was an indictment not only of the Resident Manager but of senior management in the Congregation.**
 - **The Superior's refusal to deal with these allegations properly at the outset and his continued reluctance to remove the employee should have raised serious concerns as to his suitability for the position of Resident Manager. While the Visitor criticised the Superior for his 'stupidity', he did not comment on the consequences for the Institution of having a man in charge who was incapable of dealing with such a fundamental problem involving the safety of children. The Superior continued in office until the end of his term some years later.**

Br Perryn

8.292 Br Perryn was discussed in the earlier section on physical abuse, but his eventual removal from Letterfrack was as a result of sexual abuse there.

8.293 The Visitation Report of 1941 revealed a very serious case of sexual abuse by Br Perryn who was in Letterfrack since 1927 and also from 1913 to 1919. The Report did not contain details of the allegations but they were shocking enough to alarm the Visitor and to demand immediate action:

Br Perryn has charge of the boy's kitchen. He is dirty, untidy, almost repulsive. He is never present for Morning Prayers, but usually present for Mass, and Night prayers, but never or very rarely at any other exercise. The Brothers tell me that they have never seen him going to Confession, though he told me that he goes regularly to the local priests in the chapel. I don't believe him. Superior tells me that his word can't be relied on, and that he frequently lies. It is alleged that his relations with the boys are immoral, and if the statements that I have got from the boys and which I now submit to the Br Provincial are true, he has been living a most depraved, unclean, and gravely immoral life for years. So bad are the charges that I could not conscientiously allow him to remain with boys any

longer, and availed of the fact that he got a fit on the day that I arrived to send him to the O'Brien Institute for a "Rest". I think he suspects that it was only a ruse to get him out.

8.294 The Visitor got statements from the boys involved which were 'so shockingly obscene, revolting and abominable that it is hard to believe them'. The boys said that they were afraid to reveal the malpractices through fear of the Brother. In addition to sexual abuse he was also violent towards the boys.

8.295 The Visitation Report continued:

Unfortunately, for years there has been much immorality among the boys. Onanism and Sodomy have been frequent, and these practices take place wherever the boys congregate, in the play field, lavatories, schools, kitchen and in the grounds. Formerly the boys were allowed to go out by themselves and then these practices were frequent. Boys wandered away among the fields and roads and mountain and immoral practices were carried on. Accusations have been made against Br Perryn in this respect also, and my investigations seem to confirm the charges. I have got statements from the boys with whom he is alleged to have had immoral relations. They are so shockingly obscene, revolting and abominable that it is hard to believe them. I have sent him to the O'Brien on the plea of ill health as I could not conscientiously leave him in charge of the boys until the matter is dealt with. Boys got a Retreat last Christmas and since then things seem to have somewhat improved. I fear that the boys have been making bad confessions, and would recommend that Fr. C Counihan be requested to give them a Retreat at once, so that the boys may get a chance now that Br Perryn is away. Boys whom I interviewed told me that they were afraid to reveal the malpractices through fear of Br Perryn. It is alleged that he beats them, kicks them, catches them by the throat etc. and uses them for immoral ends. I found superintendence of the boys at times very slack. For instance, on many mornings there is only an old man ... in charge when the boys are getting up and dressing and washing. Many mornings there is no Br present when the boys are saying their prayers. [The man] says the prayers with them. Boys get up at 7 and attend mass at 7.30 Dublin time. House time is one hour later. The boys in the Junior Dormitory do not get up until 7.30. There is no Br with these either at that time. A monitor is in charge though one of these monitors was recently carrying on immoral conduct with some of the juniors in the dormitory. The Superior has now arranged that a Brother takes charge of both dormitories when the children are getting up. I also found that no Br was in charge of the boys between 2.30 and 3.00 this is one of the times when it is alleged that Br Perryn was most active with his vile practices. The night watchman has no "punch clock" so there is no guarantee that he is doing his work of superintendence at night properly. He leaves each morning at 6.30.

8.296 The Visitor also found out that the Superior, Br Troyes, had not been informed of the alleged immorality between the boys and Br Perryn. Br Jourdan,³⁸ who was a teaching Brother, discovered what was happening with Br Perryn from the statement from one of Br Perryn's victims. Br Jourdan told the Visitor that he did not tell the Superior as the Superior would not have believed him; he does, however, appear to have confided in another young Brother. When asked why he did not report it directly to the Br Provincial he explained that he only found out towards the end of March and expected the annual Visitation to take place any week thereafter. The Visitor left a list of 17 directions with the Superior, some of which were designed to improve the supervision of the boys.

³⁸ This is a pseudonym.

- 8.297** The Superior General later commented on this matter in a letter to the Provincial:
Br Jourdan's handling of the Perryn revelations appears to me very indiscreet; he omitted reference to the Superior and took the young inexperienced lay Brother into his confidence.
- 8.298** Br Perryn spent 20 years in Letterfrack and a three-year period in Cork. He spent short periods in nine other institutions. During his earlier period of service in Letterfrack the Sub-Superior complained of this Brother's 'notorious' severity toward the boys. A Visitation Report from 1919 commented:
Owing to some trouble, which Br Director attributed chiefly to the woman cook at the monastery Br Perryn was freed from all duties connected with the boys kitchen and refectory, and is now in charge of the monastery kitchen ... Br Perryn does not associate much with the Brs of the Community and does not according to my information, care for his personal duties as contrasted with his charge of the boys refectory. My own impression is that a change to a non-residential school would be very desirable.
- 8.299** Br Perryn was described as being stern and distant and notoriously severe by Br Gardiner, another Brother in the Letterfrack Community, in a letter to the Br Superior dated 3rd April 1917.
- 8.300** Br Perryn was moved to Baldoyle in July 1919, a month after a Visitor had recommended that a move to a non-residential school 'would be very desirable'.
- 8.301** The Christian Brothers in their Submission commented:
It is difficult to explain how Br Perryn was reappointed to Letterfrack when he had been found to have been physically abusive during his first period in Letterfrack from 1913–1919.
- 8.302** A number of reasons were suggested by the Congregation for the return of Br Perryn:
- The authorities dealing with the case in 1919 were the General Council while subsequent to 1922 appointments were assigned by the Provincial Council which was established in 1922.
 - The Provincial Council that came into existence in 1922 may not have been aware of complaints made against Br Perryn.
 - No member of the General Council was appointed to the Provincial Council in 1922 and hence Brother Perryn was returned to Letterfrack in 1927 by authorities who had no knowledge of the problem.
- 8.303** Then they concluded:
Although this incident of the abuse was dealt with as soon as it came to the attention of the Congregation Leadership, it is most unfortunate that the early warning signs had not been acted upon adequately.
- 8.304**
- **When the Visitor was presented with information by one of the Brothers in Letterfrack, he investigated at once. He took statements from the boys involved, and was so horrified about the information that he took immediate action to remove the Brother.**
 - **The Congregation described in the Opening Statement how a trial of this Brother had been arranged in 1941 which would have led to his dismissal if he was found guilty. The trial did not proceed because the Brother was permitted to apply for a dispensation from his vows which was granted.**

- It is significant that the same Resident Manager was in charge during Br Perryn's and Mr Russel's time, namely, Br Troyes, who was in the School from 1935 to 1941.
- Br Perryn was the second Brother referred to by Noah Kitterick in his letter to the Provincialate in 1953. Noah Kitterick alleged sexual and physical abuse by this man when he was in Letterfrack from 1924 to 1932, which was during Br Perryn's second period there. The Congregation must have been aware of this man's history and yet they refused to engage with Mr Kitterick or to acknowledge his complaint in any way.
- The Congregation's comment that 'it is most unfortunate that the early warning signs had not been acted upon adequately' failed to address the fundamental questions raised by this case.
- The fact that this Brother was able to abuse boys undetected and unreported for such a long period is indicative of a serious failing in the management of the school.
- To compound the seriousness of this case, even the Brother who discovered the abuse felt unable to report it to his Superior, waiting instead for the annual Visitation to disclose what he had heard. If a member of the Congregation felt that the Superior would not believe him, it is hardly surprising that the boys felt unable to speak up. This Superior was the same man who had refused to acknowledge the case of Mr Russel, referred to above. He was also the Resident Manager when an anonymous letter was sent to the Provincial regarding Br Piperel.
- The fact that the Brother had felt unable to report the matter to the Superior and had to go through the Visitor was not addressed. Instead, the Brother was criticised for his indiscretion in mentioning the matter to another Brother in the School.
- The documents do not record the 14 years of abuse by this man, which indicates that there was a higher level of sexual abuse in the Institution than was revealed by the evidence.

Br Leandre³⁹

8.305 Br Leandre, who served in Letterfrack during the mid-1940s, was unhappy in religious life from before taking his final vows but feared 'eternal damnation' if he left. He had been reprimanded by the Provincialate for 'deliberately making contact with seculars' and informed that there was no good reason why he should be freed from his vows. His Superior 'implored me not to leave' and so he continued with his vocation and worked as a Christian Brother for 16 years.

8.306 Br Leandre first applied for dispensation in 1950, having sought advice from a Confessor who helped him prepare his case; he was refused, and he applied again in 1951 and in 1952, but was refused on each occasion. In his 1954 application, he spelled out the position more clearly and this had the desired effect:

Furthermore I find it impossible to live up to the obligations of my vow of chastity. Repeated exhortation by confessors, despite my earnest cooperation, fail to rid me of this vice. They seemed to think that married life would provide the best cure, and personally I feel or rather have found out by experience that that would be the best thing for me. A virtuous female friend has more than once saved me from breaking my vow of chastity. Men friends, e.g. my confreres, have no influence over me; rather I am essentially a husband.

For conscience reasons, I intend when I leave the brothers, to take up some other occupation other than teaching. However, I am leaving this decision, in the hands of the confessor, who prompted me to write this petition. He is of the opinion that when I will be no longer bound to celibacy, this matter will right itself, though personally I am scared of having to deal with innocent boys and be the cause of their committing sin ...

³⁹ This is a pseudonym.

I should mention, that, though I always wanted to leave, I always feared doing so, because during my formative years, I was often told that terrible calamities overtook those who returned to the world, followed by eternal damnation, in consequence of their “betrayal”. In proof of this, a quotation from Sacred Scripture was often recited “he that puts his hand to the plough and looks back is not fit for the kingdom of Heaven” thus it was I was convinced that I should not leave, no matter how I felt about it.

I should mention that when I presented my case to the Sacred Congregation in 1950, it was a case that had been considerably watered down by a confessor, so as not to, as he said, incriminate myself unduly.

I have now stated the reasons, which before God, prompt me to seek a dispensation.

8.307 The Congregation pointed out in its Submission that there were no contemporaneous complaints against this Brother while he was in Letterfrack. However, he and another Brother were criticised in a Visitation Report in 1945 for spending ‘most of their time down about the Boys’ Dormitories, in their rooms and away from the House’ His letter suggested that this man had a strong attraction towards boys from before his profession as a Brother and it may be suspected that he had sexual relations with boys during his time in Letterfrack. The Brother said in his letter that he was on the point of not taking final vows, but a lack of courage prevented him from refusing, indicating that the problem he had with the vow of chastity was of long standing.

8.308 This Brother continued to teach in national schools for boys in Dublin until the mid-1980s. He left the employ of the Christian Brothers in the same month as he received his dispensation and took up a teaching position in a boys’ school in another county. He continued teaching in boys’ schools for the rest of his career but not in any Christian Brothers’ schools, although he had declared that it was his intention to take up another occupation instead of teaching because ‘I am scared of having to deal with innocent boys and be the cause of their committing sin’.

- 8.309**
- **Br Leandre should not have been in a position to continue his teaching career after his dispensation. He openly acknowledged to the Congregation that he was a danger to boys, and the Department of Education should have been alerted to this danger by the Provincialate. No record of any such warning appeared in the Christian Brothers or the Department of Education files.**
 - **He was appointed to a teaching post in 1954. The question arises whether a reference was given by the Christian Brothers or no reference was sought by the new school when this appointment was made. In either case, safety of children was disregarded and the Brother’s position was protected.**

Br Destan⁴⁰

8.310 Br Destan served in Letterfrack for one year in the 1940s. He was then transferred to three different day schools in four years and stayed in his final school for four years. He was dispensed from his vows in the late 1950s.

8.311 Although the correspondence on file referred to the existence of other letters, the relevant available information was contained in a letter from one of the management team in St Helen’s Province to the Superior General. The writer enclosed two letters (which have not survived) from the Brother seeking a dispensation. The senior Brother who passed on the request told the Superior General:

He seeks a dispensation from his vows and for the present I am not sure whether we should recommend it or not. He is by no means quite normal and as you will see from the correspondence had been in trouble with boys and got a canonical warning. He now

⁴⁰ This is a pseudonym.

seeks a dispensation for conscientious reasons but does not say what these reasons are. It is quite possible that he is in trouble again but I do not know.

8.312 The fact that this Brother was moved around so much and spent such short periods in the different schools, gives rise to suspicion. As noted in the above letter, he had a history of 'trouble with boys' and had received a Canonical Warning. On the occasion of a transfer to a school in County Wicklow, the Provincial warned the Superior 'in strictest confidence' to exercise vigilance, so that 'with this vigilance perhaps the danger is more remote'.

8.313 • **This was one of the few examples where the Christian Brothers acknowledged in writing that a Brother who interfered with boys was dangerous and required vigilance. It is difficult to reconcile this awareness with cases that were documented in their own records. Men who were known to abuse boys were frequently sent to industrial schools where the opportunities for offending were greatly increased and the possibility of detection much reduced.**

Br Avenall⁴¹

8.314 Br Avenall served in Letterfrack in the late 1940s. His period in Letterfrack seems to have been in the interim between the first and second years of his teacher training. He served in a number of institutions, most notably in a day school from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s. In or about 1974, a complaint was made that he had been involved in improper conduct with a boy. When he was informed about this by the Provincial, he denied that there was any truth in the accusation. Some years previously, there had been a similar complaint and the matter was investigated by a previous Provincial. On that occasion also, the Brother denied that there was any truth in the allegation. Some time after the second of the above complaints, a Visitation took place in the day school where he was teaching, during which the Brother made a confession to the Visitor who described what happened in an appendix to his report:

During his interview with the Visitor, Brother introduced this matter on his own initiative. He was very upset because he had not been candid with the Provincial, when the latter informed him of the complaint. He was too shocked to admit his problem, and requested the Visitor to let the Provincial know the real position.

Brother said that this problem had a very long history. Some years ago there was a similar complaint made by a parent, and he was interviewed by the previous Provincial. On that occasion also he denied there was any truth in the accusation made against him. He now realised that he could [not] continue in his present state, and he asked the visitor for advice and help. He was anxious to have whatever medical and spiritual aid there was available. He would be grateful if the Provincial would arrange an interview with a suitable doctor and priest psychologist ...

Though Brother had failed to face up to his problem for many years, he was at last prepared to do so now. He was concerned about the harm he has done to the real mission of the Brothers in the area, to the boys, to the Community; he was particularly concerned about the superior who would be so hurt if he knew Brother's real position.

8.315 There were no complaints from witnesses about sexual abuse by this Brother during his time in Letterfrack, but again there must be grave suspicion in view of the information given to the Visitor years later and particularly the Brother's failure 'to face up to his problem for many years'.

⁴¹ This is a pseudonym.

Br Jean⁴²

- 8.316** In 1954 the Superior discovered that one of his Brothers had been sexually abusing children in the School. The complaint from one boy was that the Brother was ‘fiddling with him in his private parts’ and he described a number of incidents. A second boy gave somewhat similar information about the abuse carried out on him.
- 8.317** The matter was referred to the Provincial who interviewed the offender, who admitted to ‘immoral dealings’ with boys over a period of three months. Br Jean⁴³ was removed from Letterfrack. The Provincial reported that it appeared that the Brother had been initiated into this type of activity whilst he was a student in the Christian Brothers’ Novitiate. The Superior of the College had at that time carried out an inquiry into homosexual activity there that resulted in a number of the boys being sent away. This offending Brother was one of a number who were allowed to remain and who went on to become Brothers.
- 8.318** This Brother was sent to Letterfrack in the knowledge that he had a history of sexual activity. The Superior in Letterfrack should have been notified of relevant history once it was decided to assign the Brother, but there is no evidence that this was done.
- 8.319** The Congregation commented in its Opening Statement that the way this matter was dealt with ‘demonstrated how quickly the authorities acted when a complaint was brought to their attention’.
- 8.320** The Superior did not reveal to the other Brothers the reason for Br Jean’s sudden departure. Br Sorel who served in Letterfrack at the time was angry:
- At the end of the year we were told that he was fired home, we were only told then by the Manager that he had been abusing two boys ... who used to go to the sacristy every night to prepare for the Mass for the next day for the Priest. I didn’t know at the time, none of us knew at the time what had been going on between himself and the two boys, ... the then Manager had said it was his duty to keep it secret and confidential. I was surprised last week when I heard somebody saying that everybody knew it, they didn’t. The boys didn’t know it because I would have found out easily from a number of the lads if that had happened.*
- 8.321** While this witness believed that nobody knew the reason the Brother left, the evidence of former residents was that boys did know about Br Jean’s activities. One recalled hearing that Br Jean would take boys up to his room at night to give them extra lessons:
- Now, you hear rumours, but we knew that Br Jean left Letterfrack because he was abusing boys. We knew that. I knew some boys in particular who – they didn’t tell us, you just knew. How do I know? Okay, in the School we talked amongst ourselves, “why is he gone, why was he taking such a boy to his room at night pretending to be giving extra school lessons?” Now this is where I think it came from. It was fairly common knowledge amongst the boys that Br Jean was dismissed from the School because he was sexually abusing boys.*
- 8.322** Another resident in the School from the late 1940s to the mid-1950s stated that he heard rumours concerning Br Jean’s removal, in particular that he had been removed for abusing boys in the sacristy.
- 8.323** A complainant who was resident during the 1950s gave evidence to the Committee that he was sexually abused by Br Jean during his time in Letterfrack. He said that Br Jean would remove him

⁴² This is a pseudonym.

⁴³ This is a pseudonym.

from his bed at night and take him to his own bedroom, where Br Jean would kiss and fondle him and do “*various acts that should not be done*”. He said that it was part of Br Jean’s duties to act as night watchman and that enabled him to do this. The complainant stated that this occurred on average twice a week for a number of weeks, but that he was constantly in fear of Br Jean coming for him at night and as a result began to wet the bed. He further stated that he never informed anyone of the abuse at the time, as Br Jean told him that he would never be allowed to leave the Institution were he to do so. Br Jean, he stated, would also give him sweets and toys to ensure his silence. The complainant stated that he never heard any talk amongst the boys in respect of Br Jean engaging in sexual abuse. He said that he never spoke to them about it nor did anyone ever mention anything to him. Although he had no recollection of Br Jean leaving Letterfrack, he was in fact removed some weeks before the complainant’s own discharge.

8.324 There was no Visitation Report for 1954 and there was no mention of his departure from Letterfrack in the annals of the Community. This was surprising, as the annals documented all the movements of Brothers in the Community, including those on short visits to Letterfrack and any vacations or retreats taken by permanent members of staff.

8.325 In its response to the statement submitted to the Investigation Committee by the witness cited above, the Congregation said as follows:

[The complainant] makes serious allegations of sexual abuse against a “Brother Jean” which he says began “after about a week in the school”. This abuse is said to have occurred at night in Brother Jean’s bedroom. It has been very difficult for the Congregation to properly investigate this particular aspect of [this] complaint. Brother Jean left the Christian Brothers in 1954 and the Congregation is unaware of his present whereabouts.

If the abuse claimed by [the complainant] did occur it is a matter of sincere regret for the Congregation. However, I do believe that if [the complainant] had made a complaint at the time, appropriate action would have been taken. The Congregation does not and would not have condoned abuse of the kind alleged by [the complainant] in his statement.

8.326 As was customary with all such responding statements, this one was signed by a Christian Brother, in this case Br Sorel, who was quoted above as having been angry that he was not informed earlier of the reason why Br Jean was removed and that he found out only at the end of the year. Br Sorel also stated that in preparing the response he had liaised with members of the Leadership Team, who furnished him with relevant information from the Congregation’s records. The Brother who was the Superior of Letterfrack at the time of the departure of Br Jean was available for consultation when the response was prepared. It was unfortunate in these circumstances that the response statement did not give the reason for the departure of Br Jean. In the result, the Committee was given an inaccurate statement by the Congregation, and the victim of Br Jean’s activities was given the impression that his account was not believed.

8.327 In its Final Submission to the Committee following the investigation into Letterfrack the Congregation stated:

On the basis of its own records and of the evidence of [the complainant], the Congregation accepts that Br Jean was involved in some level of sexual abuse. The documentation that the Congregation has in respect of Br Jean is extremely limited, (and all of it has been given to the Commission) but it is clear that Br Jean was removed once the abuse was detected.

8.328 • **The assertion by the Congregation that the boy should have reported the abuse at the time ignored the difficulties that boys and even Brothers had in reporting sexual abuse and tended to place responsibility on the victim.**

Br Adrien⁴⁴

8.329 Br Adrien served in Letterfrack for one year in the late 1950s. A proposal by the Provincial to revoke the Brother's transfer away from Letterfrack provoked an extraordinary plea from the Resident Manager:

Your letter cancelling Br Adrien's change came as a great surprise and shock to me.

I hope you will forgive my candour in saying that I would prefer to have no one at all for the boys' kitchen than to have the constant strain of watching and worrying about him.

It is impossible to keep one's eye on him. Every time he gets my back turned he is in the kitchen and goodness knows, there are enough difficulties and worries to contend with, without having to think of him every minute and hour of the day.

The position regard the Monastery kitchen is regrettable but unfortunately he has not got proper control in the boys' department either. In my opinion he is not suitable at all to handle young boys and it is positively dangerous, especially in these times, to have him looking after them. A weakness in discipline in this important department will have a very detrimental effect on the boys' behaviour and will add to everyone's difficulties and will seriously affect the tone of the school.

Taking the above considerations into account and also your own personal knowledge of Br Adrien, I ask you seriously to reflect on the harmful effect his staying here is bound to have, and I entreat you to permit the transfer to go through as originally arranged.

8.330 The Provincial replied that the letter was very distressing, and he thought Br Adrien deserved a Canonical Warning for his disobedience and acceded to the request that his transfer should go ahead. Br Adrien was transferred to St Joseph's School for Deaf Boys in Cabra, and was subsequently transferred to a number of different schools, including Artane. He was back in Letterfrack in the late 1960s for a short period.

8.331 Whilst the nature of the conduct that made this Brother 'dangerous' and 'having a detrimental effect on the behaviour of the boys' was not set out, the implication was clear. No witnesses complained of being abused by him in Letterfrack but, during his subsequent career in Artane, he was accused of sexual abuse of boys. He was urgently removed from Artane when the Chaplain reported complaints by a boy to the management. He appears to have received no Canonical Warning for his behaviour in Artane. Following a period of work in St Joseph's School for Deaf Boys in Cabra, he was once again dispatched to Letterfrack. After leaving Letterfrack for the second time in 1968, Br Adrien worked in a number of locations before he returned to Baldoyle in the late 1990s.

8.332 In view of the history of this Brother in Letterfrack, he should not have been transferred to a school for deaf children. Following the discovery of serious sexual abuse in Artane, his subsequent transfers to the place where his behaviour was first recorded was indicative of the Congregation's priorities. If protection of children had been even a remote consideration, these transfers would not have occurred.

Br Didier⁴⁵

8.333 Br Didier taught in Letterfrack for 10 months in the late 1950s, and was then transferred to St Patrick's in Marino. A year and half later, he left Marino under a cloud and was transferred to Colaiste Mhuire. He was given a Canonical Warning in 1960 on account of his "interfering incorrectly" with boys who had been in his class. He was advised that the object of the warning was so that he would not fall into that fault again:

⁴⁴ This is a pseudonym.

⁴⁵ This is a pseudonym.

After consultation with the Provincial Council I have decided to give you a canonical warning on account of your interfering incorrectly with boys who had been in your class. The object of this warning is that you will not fall into this fault again.

8.334 There was no explanation for the short duration of his service in Letterfrack notwithstanding his position as teacher. He taught in five more schools.

Br Dax

8.335 Br Dax was convicted of sexually abusing 25 former pupils, some of whom gave evidence to the Investigation Committee.

8.336 During the course of Br Dax's evidence to the Investigation Committee, counsel for Br Dax told the Committee that Br Dax accepted that he was guilty in respect of further charges.

8.337 Br Dax worked in Letterfrack for two periods, from the late 1950s to the mid-1970s, having previously spent over five years in St Joseph's School for Deaf Boys, Cabra. He was in charge of the kitchen and the poultry farm and also did relief work for other Brothers from time to time, which sometimes involved supervising the dormitories. For the first two years of his time in the School, he slept in a room adjacent to the dormitory. He accepted that, with one exception, his abusive activity spanned nearly the entirety of his period in the school. This exception was for a period of two years, and was due to the influence of his Confessor, who made clear to him the sinfulness of his conduct. However, he relapsed as soon as this priest was transferred.

8.338 Br Dax told the Committee that he started sexually abusing children approximately six months after his arrival in the School. He said it started *'with immodest touching and eventually leading to buggery'*.

8.339 The abuse generally took place in the kitchen area, the poultry farm or the boiler room. He accepted during cross-examination that it could also have taken place in the room adjacent to the dormitory or in the incubator room in the monastery.

8.340 Although he admitted raping and fondling boys, he preferred to reserve his position on whether he masturbated them, forced them to masturbate him or engaged in oral sex.

8.341 He said that he would abuse the same children regularly and that, at any one period in his career in the School, he could have been abusing a number of children at the same time. The abuse would often continue until the particular boy left the School. He accepted that he would often keep boys behind after work for the express purpose of abusing them. As to the frequency of his assaults, he accepted the suggestion that he would have raped some boys once or maybe twice a week for a prolonged period of time.

8.342 Br Dax described how he would select his victims. He said that he did not have a favourite type of boy who he would be more likely to abuse. Indeed, he was unable to tell the Committee why he picked on some boys rather than others, other than to say that it was simply a matter of convenience for him. He did not appear to have engaged in a policy of risk assessment. He simply abused the children that he had regular contact with.

8.343 He said that he had nothing to do with the allocation of the boys to their chores as this was done by the Disciplinarian. He was asked whether the boys ever objected to him and he replied that they did not, although he did recall a number of boys who asked him to stop. He said that, when this happened, he would stop. On further questioning, however, he admitted that the main reason for stopping was the boys' leaving Letterfrack or moving to a different trade.

- 8.344** Br Dax was asked about the extent to which other people knew of his activities. He said that, as far as he was aware, no adults other than his Confessor were aware of his activities, although he accepted that the children who worked in the kitchen would have known about them. He also accepted that it was possible that a wider pool of children would have been aware of his inclinations. He was also asked about his awareness of the risk of detection. He said he could not recall taking any specific steps to avoid detection. He was asked how he avoided being caught and told the Committee that he could not put his finger on the reason but he thought the fact that he worked alone in the kitchen was a factor. He was also isolated from other members of the Community due to the nature of his work. By virtue of the fact that he cooked for the boys, he himself never attended a Community meal in the 15 years he spent in Letterfrack.
- 8.345** He accepted during cross-examination by counsel for a number of complainants that he used threats to prevent the boys from informing on him. He also accepted that the boys would cry and be upset after he abused them and that he would not release them until they had calmed down.
- 8.346** It was put to him during cross-examination that it was astounding that he was able to abuse children for 15 years without detection and that nobody other than the boys or himself knew about it. Br Dax accepted that it was astounding but stressed that nobody ever spoke to him on the subject or suspected him until he was arrested during the course of the police investigation into Letterfrack.
- 8.347** He said that he remembered that Br Vallois⁴⁶ left suddenly but stated that he did not discover that this was because he was sexually abusing children until many years later. Similarly, he said that he had no idea why Mr Albaric⁴⁷ left. He speculated that, if there had been an investigation into the activities of Br Vallois, he might have been frightened into stopping his own activities.
- 8.348** Br Dax was cross-examined at length by the Congregation about what motivated or led him to sexually abuse children. He attributed his abusive activities to overwork and a feeling of isolation. Counsel for the Congregation put it to him that these were feelings that would have been shared by many members of staff in Letterfrack, yet they did not all resort to the sexual abuse of children for release. Br Dax later contended that his actions were due to a mix of isolation, loneliness and his own *'human weakness'*. Earlier in his evidence, Br Dax accepted that he could be described as a *'loner'* and tended not to engage or socialise with the other Brothers in Letterfrack.
- 8.349** Br Dax confirmed that in his *'human weakness'* his way of dealing with loneliness was to engage in sexual abuse of boys. When asked how he would go about satisfying that human weakness, Br Dax simply stated *'Touching, embracing'*. Br Dax could not explain why he behaved differently to other Brothers who were equally isolated from their families.
- 8.350** During cross-examination by counsel for a number of complainants, Br Dax said that the abuse was primarily about release for him. This was reiterated during his questioning by the Committee, when he stated that he never formed any emotional relationships with the boys.
- 8.351** While Br Dax admitted committing sexual offences against 25 boys in Letterfrack, only four of these gave evidence to the Investigation Committee. It follows that the full extent of this Brother's sexual activity was not put before the Committee, even with regard to the crimes for which he was convicted.
- 8.352** One of the boys in respect of whom Br Dax pleaded guilty to having abused told the Committee that Br Dax selected him to work in the kitchen because the other kitchen boy had run away. At the time, he thought he was on the *'pig's back'*, because working in the kitchen would give him

⁴⁶ This is a pseudonym.

⁴⁷ This is a pseudonym.

access to extra food and warmth. He knew that Br Dax could be bad tempered but soon learned to adjust to his moods. He was alone in the kitchen the first time he was abused by Br Dax, and initially he did not realise anything bad was happening. He just thought that Br Dax was being affectionate.

8.353 However, matters soon deteriorated:

Well it started off I was helping, I was doing little odd jobs before I actually went in as kitchen boy and suddenly there was nobody there except Br Dax. But I didn't really, to me there was nothing wrong with it. He was being nice, you know. He used to call me [Robert].⁴⁸ Never grown to hate a name so much. Anyway, we ended up in the back kitchen and I don't know how he got up behind me, I never really thought about it, but suddenly his hands going up and down my tummy, and then his hands are inside my clothes and it is, "you are all right, [Robert], you are all right [Robert]". He actually touched the top of my penis. Now, I didn't know what sex was and suddenly he shivered and as I turned around, well, I know now what he was doing, he was ejaculating, but at the time, well, to be quite truthful, I thought he was deformed. You know, what the hell is this coming out of you? You want to go and see a doctor, and he actually gave me a cigarette but I didn't smoke at the time. I gave it to one of the other boys for some Cleeves. Things like that went on ... One time when I was trying to stop it, he actually said, I would be paying a visit to the courthouse and I knew exactly what that meant ... That he would be taking me up to the courthouse and have me transferred to Daingean. That is the only possible reason you would go to the courthouse ... Do what he says or else. Yes. I mean, Letterfrack was bad. Daingean was worse. You know, I would commit suicide ...

8.354 He recalled the first time he was raped:

Sex, my introduction to sex was in the back kitchen of Letterfrack, jammed up against a boiler, getting my leg burnt and getting raped by Br Dax.

8.355 He continued:

... we had showers every Saturday, Saturday afternoon. So, yes. He ended up behind me again, but it was different. He started to open my clothes and I am "stop it" and he jammed me between two boilers. Well, one boiler really. He was at the other, and I was at this one. He started trying to put something into me, and at the time, I honestly didn't know what it was, and suddenly I got this unmerciful pain and – well, I went off into a different world. I don't know, but when I actually, I won't say came back – he was on his knees in front of me, buttoning up my fly. "Are you are all right?" Every time I moved I had this pain, and I went out to the boys toilets and I sat there. I was sobbing my heart out. Somebody shouted in "showers". We all had to go to our dormitories for showers, and I still couldn't understand what he had done with me.

I mean anyway, we used to go down to the showers wearing a pair of swimming trunks that were made by the School, and I think it was 20 at a time, I am not sure. There was a line here and a line there and a handle at the end. I was at the end. Br Guillaume⁴⁹ took showers. I was sobbing my heart out. Now Br Guillaume was the type of man that if I broke wind in the farmyard, he knew about it in the play yard. He had his finger on it, it didn't matter what went on in the school, I don't know how, we used to wonder how he knew, but he never asked me what happened. The only thing I can think of is he knew what happened.

Anyway, that night, the cinemas, and the boys sat on the seats here. It was a projection room behind and the Brothers used to sit there or around the potbelly fire. Br Dax came

⁴⁸ This is a pseudonym.

⁴⁹ This is a pseudonym.

in, and I was in the middle and he called up my line, “[Robert, Robert] here” . Was a half slab of Cleeves. Well, I took it and I just slung it, I want nothing off the – and that is something that isn’t often done – well, it wasn’t to my experience, and Br Guillaume was behind, he had to see. Why am I getting this preferential treatment? I won’t say I find it hard to believe, I find it impossible to believe that he didn’t know, not only what went on, but what was going on. There is no way, what happened to me over that period of time, that they didn’t know. All of them. Every single one of them, and I hope they all rot in hell.

8.356 The witness said that he knew that the same was happening to other boys, because of the way Br Dax behaved towards them, which would now be called grooming:

Yes, I knew how he behaved with me and I could see the way he was behaving with them, and it was identical ... “Come and help me with the chickens”, that was regarded as a little perk. Or “let’s go down to the orchard, I want to get some apples. I am going to make apple jam”, or something or other. You knew damn well he wasn’t making apple jam. The man couldn’t boil an egg. I done most of the bloody cooking, but you knew, you seen all the signs.

8.357 He said that the boys reacted in different ways: some went very quiet, whilst others became aggressive, but the change in them was very noticeable. He identified two individuals whom he was convinced Br Dax was abusing, although they never said anything to him.

8.358 He was cross-examined on his assertion that the Congregation knew about Br Dax’s activities:

To say that they didn’t know would be to say that the sun doesn’t shine tomorrow because in a school like that, there is 120 boys, they all know what is going on. Everyone knew what was going on, there were very few that didn’t know, the only thing was we didn’t speak about it because we were ashamed of it. I am still ashamed of it, I should have cut his bloody throat. He didn’t know? Br Guillaume didn’t know? I sat down and sobbed my heart out, that man knew and he never answered. He should have turned around and said to me “what was going on, why are you crying?” but what did he do he continued on with the shower and sent me up to dry off – he didn’t know? ... If I was to stand in front of my maker tomorrow I would have the same position, they knew what went on. Some of them were doing it, some of them were covering it ... The ones that were covering are twice as guilty as the ones that didn’t because they could have stopped it.

8.359 Counsel for Br Dax stated that he had no questions for the complainant. Br Dax was asked during his own evidence whether he had any recollection of the complainant and replied that he did not, even though the complainant was one of the individuals in respect of whom he pleaded guilty to sexually abusing. In his response statement, Br Dax adopted a Garda Statement in which he stated that he remembered the complainant and that he worked in the kitchen. He accepted that he would have caught and pulled him towards him on several occasions, and that he would have touched his private parts and ejaculated at the same time. He also accepted the allegation that he came up behind the complainant while the latter was cleaning the kitchen, undressed him and raped him. He could not recall how often this type of activity occurred but he accepted that it did happen on several occasions, either in the kitchen or the storeroom. The complainant was about 15 at the time. He said that he was ‘*deeply sorry for the hurt caused and I apologise*’.

8.360 Another witness who gave evidence was also one of the individuals Br Dax admitted sexually abusing. Br Dax pleaded guilty to indecently assaulting this witness. The witness’s evidence was that the abuse occurred during milking time, but this was strongly disputed by the Congregation in cross-examination who pointed out that the records proved that Br Dax did not have farming duties, and that his duties in the kitchen would have made it impossible for him to have been around the milking sheds during milking. Br Dax did not dispute the witness’s evidence at the

hearing, and the issue of whether Br Dax had duties other than the kitchen was raised only by the Congregation.

- 8.361** The evidence of this witness was that Br Dax would ask him to stay behind after the milking was done. He said that Br Dax started kissing and fondling him and then he had to *'touch him up'*. This happened about three times a week until he was released. On one occasion, the witness attempted to stop Br Dax by cutting himself with a knife. Br Dax panicked and, when the Resident Manager asked what happened, he told him that the witness had slipped. The witness said that, following his discharge from Letterfrack, Br Dax visited him at home and attempted to abuse him there but he was able to resist.
- 8.362** During Br Dax's own hearing before the Committee, he stated that he was in charge of the poultry farm and went there daily to attend the chickens and hens. He also stated that he abused boys in the poultry shed, as he was fairly safe from detection there.
- 8.363** He said that he did not have anything to do with the cows or sheep, but the poultry operation was in the same area and boys would occasionally come after their milking duties to help him.
- 8.364** Br Dax was not questioned by the Congregation on this issue at his hearing.
- 8.365** The Congregation in its final Submission to the Investigation Committee said that the conviction of Br Dax spoke for itself and they did not wish to make any submissions on the extent of the sexual abuse committed by him. They did, however, express reservations about the evidence of this complainant, which they believed showed how a false allegation could be made on the basis of information obtained from sources other than the witness's own experience.
- 8.366** The Congregation maintained this position even after it heard the evidence of Br Dax and in circumstances where it did not examine him on the extent of his duties outside of the kitchen. It appears that the Congregation relied on their own records to dispute the evidence of this complainant, even when those records were disproved by the respondent himself.
- 8.367** Another complainant who was resident for two years in the early 1960s was also one of the individuals Br Dax admitted sexually abusing. Br Dax pleaded guilty to indecently assaulting this man. The complainant gave evidence that he worked in the kitchen and that Br Dax fondled him and pushed up against him while masturbating himself. The abuse was carried out by Br Dax under the guise of his wiping something off the complainant's *'cowman's coat'*, during which time Br Dax pushed up against him and fondled his chest and grabbed his shoulders and masturbated. The boys would put on this coat when requested by Br Dax to fetch milk. The complainant stated that putting on the coat *'meant at the time he wanted to masturbate'*.
- 8.368** Another ex-resident, who was there in the late 1960s and who worked in the kitchen, said that Br Dax was prone to violent mood swings, one moment he would be nice and give the boys cake and sweets, the next he would beat them unmercifully. He recalled one incident of sexual abuse which occurred in the back kitchen, where Br Dax attempted to abuse him but which the complainant fought off by throwing boiling water at him.
- 8.369** Counsel for Br Dax did not ask any questions of this witness. In his response to the Committee he adopted his Garda Statement in which he stated, *'I honestly can't remember the incident ... or the boy himself'*.
- 8.370** Another man who worked in the kitchen as a tea boy in the late 1960s said that, when everybody was gone from the refectory, the tea boys would wash the pots before leaving. On one occasion,

Br Dax asked him to stay back after everybody else had left. Br Dax calmly poured a cup of tea, then took his penis out and forced the boy to give him oral sex:

He sat me down, made me a cup of tea, well, poured a cup of tea, and then he took his penis out ... And he pushed my head down on to his lap, and I had to give him oral sex ... I got back up, sat up straight and he started opening my trousers then, but I wouldn't, so I resisted him. He got angry with me then and he smacked me with a teapot. There was a teapot and he just hit me on the head.

- 8.371** The complainant never went back to the kitchen again.
- 8.372** Another ex-resident in respect of whom Br Dax pleaded guilty was too upset to go into detail about the abuse suffered at the hands of Br Dax and asked that the Committee accept his Garda statement and the response to that statement as his evidence, which the Committee agreed to do.
- 8.373** In his statement the complainant said that he worked in the kitchen in Letterfrack alongside two other boys. He said that Br Dax would get him on his own and that he would ask the complainant to masturbate him with his hand first to get him an erection and then he would try to rape him. He recalled two specific instances where Br Dax penetrated him. He said that the abuse always took place on Saturday evenings before tea.
- 8.374** Br Dax would organise matters so that there would be just one boy there at that time of the evening. He suspected that Br Dax was abusing other boys, because there were a number of boys who refused to work in the kitchen. However, he said that he never discussed the abuse with anyone because he was afraid of Br Dax. Br Dax would beat and hit him, often for no reason, and the boys were terrified of him.
- 8.375** After he was raped the second time he refused to work in the kitchen. He ran away and as punishment he was banned from working in the kitchen:
- To work in the kitchen was thought to be a privilege although in fact it was the worse possible place to be if you were sexually abused by Br Dax.*
- 8.376** In his response statement, Br Dax adopted a Garda Statement in which he admitted fondling the complainant and forcing him to engage in masturbation. He accepted that he might also have asked the complainant to 'kiss his penis'. He also accepted that he raped him although he could not recall how many times this had occurred. He did not recall digitally penetrating the complainant but accepted that it might have occurred, and he accepted that the abuse could have happened in a room off the kitchen.
- 8.377** The Congregation's response to the statement of this complainant did not focus on the admitted facts of the abuse, but instead concentrated on the areas of minor inconsistencies, such as the discrepancies in the age of the complainant at the time of the alleged abuse and details about his work in the kitchen.
- 8.378** Another ex-pupil who gave evidence worked on the poultry farm with Br Dax. He said he enjoyed the work there because he had a great deal of freedom as Br Dax also worked in the kitchen. He got on well with Br Dax to a point but he was sexually abused by him.
- 8.379** He said that Br Dax slept in a room next to his dormitory and on Saturday mornings he would be required to clean this room.

8.380 The complainant stated that for about 10 weeks he was abused by Br Dax on Saturday mornings while he cleaned the room. He stated that Br Dax would rub talcum powder around his neck whilst 'kissing you like you were a girl'. The complainant recalled that:

... he'd lie on top of me and sexually ... he would have his penis between your buttocks and moving himself about and ejaculated and that's it.

8.381 He said that Br Dax also abused him in a room in the monastery, which was used for incubating the chicks. On one occasion when Br Dax was abusing him he said that a Brother, he thinks it was Br Noreis, knocked at the window to get Br Dax to stop:

Br Dax is kind of loving me, like, arms around me, loving me inside in the room and I think it was Br Noreis, knocks at the window. It was like a mild reprimand, a little joke and it stopped ... Nothing serious, like, but what he was doing you would have some explaining. Like, if I got a child now or I got a young fellow. I keep saying a child because we were children down there.

8.382 The abuse continued until the complainant threatened to tell a local priest. Br Dax did not react in any way other than to stop his abuse. The complainant could never bring himself to tell the priest of what had happened to him. The Investigation Committee found the complainant's account of sitting in a shed outside the priest's house, trying to work up the courage to tell somebody, moving:

I would be fearful of saying it, of the consequences. I would be fearful of the consequences. Even if he believed me about what was taking place, there is no reason for me to suspect that he is going to act on it. Like, who is going to challenge – like, what is he going to do? Who am I, as a child, am I – am I going to put this particular Christian Brother and the good name of the Christian Brothers in jeopardy by what this man is doing to me of a Saturday in his room? I have the good sense to know that. But at the same time I used to get excited. Now, I went down there about five times down to his house but I never went to the door. But I feel that if he had probably come out to the door I might have gone over and said something and blurted it out and lived with it or whatever. It didn't happen. It stopped with Br Dax and I worked with Br Dax after that until I left.

8.383 He would not have been able to complain to the Superior:

I got on very well with Br Guillaume. No, I would have been embarrassed to go to Br Guillaume . I would have been embarrassed to go to Br Guillaume . None of us lads ever spoke about these things. They don't actually talk about it now, believe it or not. They only talk in general ways. People don't go into detail about it. Br Guillaume, no, I never did. I liked Br Guillaume.

8.384 During cross-examination, counsel for the Congregation made much of the fact that Br Dax never slept in a room adjacent to the dormitory. However, in his own evidence, Br Dax stated that he spent the first two years in such a room. Br Dax admitted that he possibly did abuse the complainant on the poultry farm and in the room adjacent to the dormitory. It is inexplicable why the Congregation would seek to undermine a bona fide witness by challenging evidence that was subsequently confirmed by the respondent himself.

8.385 None of the individual respondents who gave evidence to the Committee of having worked alongside Br Dax suspected that he was an abuser.

8.386 Br Dondre described Br Dax as follows:

He was a sort of a witty sort of person, he liked having a laugh. He liked joking. He took his job; he took the kitchen thing very serious. He invited me in a couple of times to test the food, to taste it and that, yes. Didn't see much of him because when he was on duty, when he was doing the kitchen work, I was doing something else. As a Community man, well, as a Community, the Brothers saw very little of each other in Letterfrack.

8.387 Br Anatole described Br Dax as a friendly individual who worked very hard and who was good at his job. He also said he saw no evidence of any abuse by Br Dax in Letterfrack.

8.388 Br Karel, who had been the Superior of Letterfrack for two years, said that he had an argument with Br Dax over the manner in which the refectory was run. He said that he told Br Dax to give the boys more food and that he supervised a meal to ensure that the bigger boys were not stealing food from the smaller boys.

8.389 Br Telfour was asked whether there was anything from his recollection of Br Dax's behaviour at the time that 'clicked' when he heard Br Dax had been imprisoned. He replied that there was not.

- 8.390**
- **Br Dax perpetrated sexual abuse, often with violence, on boys in Letterfrack over a period of 14 years. The Congregation has failed to address the question as to how it was possible for him to continue undetected for so long.**
 - **There are two possibilities: either the Brothers or some of them were aware of Br Dax's activities but did nothing or they were not aware, in which case it must be asked why none of his many victims disclosed the abuse. Neither scenario reflects credit on the Institution or on the Brothers who worked there.**
 - **Many of the accounts of abuse would not have been verifiable but for the admissions of the Brother, and only four of those who were named in criminal charges came to the Investigation, which implies that the incidence of such behaviour is substantially more than could be established in evidence.**
 - **The Christian Brothers have accepted that Br Dax sexually abused boys in Letterfrack and have expressed their regret for this, but their approach to many of the witnesses was adversarial and even confrontational – calling into question evidence that the accused himself did not challenge or contradict. This approach was unnecessarily distressing for complainants.**

Br Vallois

8.391 In the early 1960s, Br Vallois left Letterfrack because of a complaint of sexual abuse of a boy. There is no documentary evidence of this incident and the only information came from a Brother who had served in Letterfrack and who gave evidence to the Committee. Br Vallois was sent to Letterfrack as a temporarily professed Brother. The witness was in charge of the senior boys' dormitory and Br Vallois, who seemed keen and enthusiastic, asked the witness to allow him to take the boys to bed. A boy reported to a Brother that Br Vallois used to sit on the edge of his bed and touch him inappropriately. The complaint was passed on to the Superior, who informed the Provincial, and Br Vallois was brought to the Provincialate for questioning. He did not renew his vows.

8.392 Br Michel described the incident as follows:

The young man's name was Vallois, Br Vallois. He was sent to Letterfrack as a very promising young man, as a teacher and so on. He was very keen and very anxious to work. A few times he asked me – I was in charge of the senior dormitory at the time and he said to me once or twice, "could I take the boys to bed tonight because I would like to

learn the ropes?" So I said yes, I was probably glad of the break. It transpires that there was touching going on in the dormitory. Now, I am not perfectly clear who reported it, I presume it was the boy himself. I can't remember his name, but it went as far as I remember to the Disciplinary first and it went from the Disciplinary to the Manager who was Br Guillaume and within a day or two that young man was transported by car to Dublin. I am not certain if the boy concerned was brought also, I have an idea he was. So the Provincial interviewed them and I am not again certain if the offender was let back for a short time to collect his stuff, I can't recall fully. At any rate at the end of that year that young man left the Congregation. I don't know whether he was dismissed or whether he decided to discontinue as a Brother. That's the story in brief.

8.393 The Congregation's Submission stated that 'the Congregation accepts, on the basis of the evidence of Br Michel and on the basis of its own records, that Br Vallois was involved in some level of sexual abuse'.

8.394 This case suggests that prompt action could be taken if the authorities decided to do so.

Mr Albaric

8.395 In 1960s, a member of the lay staff, Mr Albaric, was removed from the School for sexually abusing children. A number of boys complained to Br Telfour: 'Mr Albaric *puts his thing against us when we are going to the toilet*'. The Brother told the boys to report the matter to the Resident Manager. The Resident Manager subsequently confirmed that the boys had complained and gave Br Telfour a letter to give to Mr Albaric informing him of his dismissal.

8.396 A number of complainants alleged that Mr Albaric sexually abused them. One said that one night he went to the toilet and Mr Albaric followed him in. There was a serious outbreak of scabies in the school at the time and Mr Albaric told the witness that he wanted to check him for infection. He then attempted to rape the witness and, in order to prevent the rape, the witness masturbated Mr Albaric. He was in a state of shock afterwards and he felt quite sick. He said that he was afraid to go to the toilet after the incident and that, as a result, he started wetting the bed for which he was punished. He heard rumours that Mr Albaric was abusing other boys as well. Apparently, the bigger boys found out what was happening and reported the matter to the authorities. The next thing they knew, Mr Albaric was gone.

8.397 Another complainant told a similar story. He said that he was a bed-wetter and that Mr Albaric, the night watchman, would abuse him in the dormitory. He said that the abuse continued until Mr Albaric left the School: '*He was finally sacked some time for abusing other kids*'.

8.398 It is significant that Br Telfour did not go to the Resident Manager with this complaint himself but left it for the boys to do so. If the boys had not acted, it is possible that Mr Albaric could have continued his activities notwithstanding the complaint that had been made.

Br Curtis⁵⁰

8.399 Br Telfour described another occasion when the same two boys as had reported Mr Albaric came to him and made what he called a very vague allegation against another Brother. The allegation, as recalled by the witness, was not that the Brother had engaged in any sexual misconduct with the two boys, but that other boys were saying that the Brother '*did things*' to them. He said that he pursued the matter with the boys who were reporting to him and tried to get something definite by way of a name or an activity, but:

⁵⁰ This is a pseudonym.

I was just getting the same – the boys – just the boys – shrug of the shoulders, as if – I didn't know how to take it. The boys say, that is all I was getting, ah just things, things. So I couldn't pursue it any further.

8.400 He felt that, because he had not got any specifics or details of the names of boys involved or what was going on or where or when it was going on, he was unable to take the complaint either to the Superior or to the Brother who was accused. Nothing further happened on the strength of that information.

8.401 Two complainants alleged that Br Curtis sexually abused them. One alleged that he and other boys were sexually abused by Br Curtis in the classroom. He described Br Curtis as '*an absolute thug ... a pure thug, a paedophile thug*'. He stated that:

The man would be there doing it in the classroom, staring at the classroom and then he would be doing it with various kids. He would take you out of the desk, get one arm, put it behind your back, your buttocks would be there leaned against the desk and he would be there pushing you back and he would be going into you.

8.402 Another witness described Br Curtis as a nice man but stated that he was regularly abused by him. Br Curtis got him a job in the laundry, which was perceived as a '*soft job*'. He started by being nice to the complainant, who welcomed the attention, although he was conscious that it was wrong. Br Curtis would take him from his bed in the mornings four or five times a week in order to abuse him. Normally, Br Curtis was gentle with him but, on one occasion during his first year in the school, he was rough and raped him. He said that Br Curtis made him feel special until he was raped:

Yes, he would make me play with him and he would – nearly every morning – as I said, there was that little room at the top of the dormitories. There was two, there was one each side, I remember, there was more than two little ones, but Br Curtis when he stayed there, when he – the first thing in the morning he would come and take me from my bed, just after our prayers, and in the pretence – and then he would take me into the little room and then he would make me either play with him or he would play with himself. ... On one occasion, he just took me in the room and he seemed very excited and he was quite rough, generally – normally, he wasn't as rough, but he just seemed to be very rough that morning and I don't know whether he inserted his penis, or, as I said – but in my anus, and I felt a lot of pain and I asked him to stop on many occasions and he didn't ... That was just the one occasion.

8.403 He said that he was too confused to report what had happened to him to anyone.

8.404 This witness described feelings of guilt mixed with an awareness of being special. He got special privileges and favours from the Brother that were resented by other boys and which led to his being bullied '*slightly*'. The Brother was good to him at times but he was still troubled:

I said at the beginning I felt special, that I was getting special treatment ... And until it got rough on that occasion, I still felt I was quite special.

8.405 The other boys noticed the special treatment he was receiving and called him a teacher's pet.

8.406 He went to Confession after he was raped and he told the Priest what had happened. He believed that the priest may have said something because, soon after, he was changed from the laundry. He did not know whether that change related to this but he thought it was a possibility.

- 8.407
- Even though it was hearsay and vague, this complaint was obviously serious and should have been followed up, especially when it came from two boys who had previously reported a case of abuse that was subsequently confirmed.
 - In this case, Br Telfour did nothing about a complaint of sexual abuse that he received. He did not even tell the boys to report it to the Superior. In the earlier case, which he had regarded as sufficiently grounded in fact, the Brother did not himself go to the Superior but sent the boys to make the report.

Br Algrenon⁵¹

8.408 Br Telfour cited an incident he witnessed soon after his arrival in the school and which involved Br Algrenon, a member of staff during the mid-1960s. He wanted to speak to Br Algrenon so he went up to his [Br Algrenon's] room. However, instead of finding Br Algrenon he found a boy washing his penis at Br Algrenon's wash basin. Br Telfour did not ask the boy why he was doing it. He told the Committee: *'I presumed he was injured and maybe too embarrassed to go into the nurse or whatever'*. The boy told him he was washing it on Br Algrenon's instruction. Br Telfour acted as if nothing strange had happened and did not enquire any further into the matter.

8.409 It is hard to understand how the sight that met Br Telfour when he opened the door of a fellow Brother's private bedroom did not make him suspicious. It is, of course, possible that this incident may not be related to sexual activity between the Brother and the boy but it should have undoubtedly raised a concern. He testified to the Committee that he did not check with Br Algrenon, as it was his first year in the place and he did not know how to handle the situation: *'No, I didn't. I didn't know how to handle this. It was my first year there. I wasn't long into the place'*.

8.410 Br Telfour told the Committee that he should have brought the complaints he got from the two boys about Br Curtis, and the incident in Br Algrenon's room, to the Superior's attention. He said that at that time he knew nothing about such activity, although he did acknowledge that he had encountered an allegation of sexual abuse whilst he was a student in Marino.

8.411 In Letterfrack, he was able to deal with the allegation against the lay worker by sending the complaining boys to the Superior but he failed, to his later regret, to deal with the complaints that were reported to him about one Brother and the incident in the other Brother's bedroom.

- 8.412
- **Br Telfour's explanation for his failure to act appropriately in any of the instances of sexual abuse reported to him was his inexperience and lack of knowledge in how to deal with such a situation. However, it points to a moral and ethical ambivalence about this issue. An adult encountering sexual abuse of a child, even in the 1960s, should have had no hesitation in acting to stop it. This Brother was wracked with indecision when a fellow Brother was involved although he did make some effort, albeit indirect, in the case of the lay worker.**
 - Responses to sexual abuse were influenced by loyalty to the Congregation and to the individual Brother rather than the need to protect children in care.
 - The preceding four incidents all occurred during Br Dax's time there, and indicate ignorance and incompetence in relation to this issue.
 - These Brothers recalled complaints about sexual abuse that were not recorded anywhere in the documentation, which reveals the difficulty of measuring the full extent of sexual abuse in Letterfrack.

⁵¹ This is a pseudonym.

Br Anatole

- 8.413** Br Anatole, a former Christian Brother who worked in Letterfrack during the late 1960s and early 1970s, was convicted of abusing three boys in Letterfrack. None of the victims gave evidence.
- 8.414** The Congregation files show that he was accused of sexual abuse in another school in which he worked after his period in Letterfrack. In 1977 a boy in a Christian Brothers day school alleged that Br Anatole had asked him to rub oil on his back and brought him to a room where he exposed himself and gave the boy 20 pence. The boy told his mother who told a Brother in the School. He promised to look into the matter. Time passed and, when the mother enquired as to the position, she discovered that nothing had been done. She was very angry and called to see the Superior, who interviewed the boy in the presence of his mother and, having elicited the details, he contacted his own authorities immediately.
- 8.415** The allegations were investigated in early September 1977. Br Anatole flatly denied the charge, and even wrote to the parents of the boy setting out details of how it could not have been him. The investigating Brother, however, did not believe him. He stated: 'To me the evidence seems convincing'.
- 8.416** In August 1977, Br Anatole was transferred to a different secondary school in Dublin where he taught for one academic year. He had previously requested a dispensation in 1977 and was granted exclaustation in May 1978.
- 8.417** After exclaustation, he taught for one academic in a rural secondary school year run by a Congregation of nuns before commencing studies for the priesthood. It should be noted that in 1978 the Provincial of St Mary's Province told the President of Holy Cross College, Clonliffe, that he could not 'unreservedly recommend Br Anatole as a suitable candidate for the priesthood'. He was accordingly not accepted as a candidate.
- 8.418** Br Anatole joined the Servite Community in September 1980. He was granted transitus to the Servites of Mary in February 1981 and a dispensation in June 1982, processed by the Servites of Mary. This was done at his request after counselling.
- 8.419** In August 1982, he joined the staff of a Dublin secondary school where he taught for 10 years. This was in two stages, with a two-year break in the middle to work on an academic text. He was convicted in 2002 in respect of abuse perpetrated in Letterfrack.
- 8.420** Br Anatole told the Committee how his abusive activities began:
- I suppose it arose out of need for intimacy, my sexuality was very very juvenile, very immature and I had no experience of women of any kind, no experience of contact with women. Out of my need for intimacy and of sexual experience, it gradually developed ...*
- 8.421** He said that the abuse generally took place in his bedroom or the wash hall, as he was careful to avoid detection and generally abused children when the other Brothers were away or unlikely to discover him in the act. He regularly used the guise of wrestling with the boys in order to disguise the actual nature of what he was engaged in. He said that he would often initiate the abuse by asking the boys whether they wanted to wrestle. He said that boys would often come to him and ask to wrestle because they wanted the treats he would give them after he had abused them. During these wrestling matches, both he and the boy would be in swimming togs and he would press up against the boy until he, Br Anatole, ejaculated. He felt that the pretence of a wrestling match 'was an innocuous way of getting some kind of physical contact with another human being', which would result in an ejaculation.

- 8.422 He told the Committee that he believed that if anyone had discovered him they would not have thought anything untoward was going on: the sight of a Brother and a boy dressed only in their swimming togs wrestling together in a room on their own would not, he thought, have raised any particular concern.
- 8.423 He selected boys mainly on the basis of physical attraction. However, he stated that he had a particular affection for one boy, and that he used to single him out more than the rest. He viewed his relationship with this boy as akin to an affair.
- 8.424 He said that some of the boys were really keen on the wrestling and he would award prizes such as cigarettes and sweets. He tried to dress the activity up as something else but he was certain that the boys knew what he was doing.
- 8.425 He told the Committee that he sexually abused the three boys during the same period, although he doubted whether they were aware of each other's involvement with him. He accepted that the other boys in the School must have known something amiss was going on.
- 8.426 The abuse did not always take the form of a surreptitious wrestling bout. He used to take one boy, who was 13 or 14 at the time, to his room at night, ostensibly to teach him to read but really to abuse him. He said that the dormitory Brother always gave permission, a matter that Br Iven denied in his evidence. Br Anatole said that he would push up against the boy from behind until he ejaculated. It would normally take between five and ten minutes and, when he was finished with him, he would send him back alone.
- 8.427 Two colleagues of Br Anatole's gave evidence.
- 8.428 Br Iven served during the late 1960s and early 1970s. He said that he never thought that there was the remotest possibility of Brothers abusing boys. He denied giving Br Anatole permission to take a boy to his room. However, he did say that, if he had been asked, he would not have suspected an ulterior motive.
- 8.429 Br Dondre said that he was not aware of Br Anatole's activities at the time.
- 8.430 The Congregation did not make any submission on the extent of the abuse committed by Br Anatole. They took issue in their Final Submissions with his evidence, which they described as inherently inconsistent and, ultimately, completely unreliable. Br Anatole had referred to his need for *'intimacy and sexual experience'* as part of the reason he engaged in sexual abuse of children. The Congregation stated:
- It is submitted that the personal factors which cause a person to abuse are probably considerably more complex than this evidence would suggest and that the evidence of these individuals does not add a great deal to the overall knowledge of the Committee on this issue.
- 8.431 Although Br Anatole pleaded guilty to indecently assaulting three named individuals, he stated that it took a relatively innocuous form and was adamant that he did not abuse these children in any other way and that he did not abuse any other children. No complainants gave evidence against him during the private hearings, and the Investigation Committee heard no evidence to contest these assertions.
- 8.432
- **Br Anatole had unsupervised access to boys at most times. Where other Brothers were engaged in sexual activity with boys, it is hardly surprising that he was able to operate without fear of detection.**

Br Benoit⁵²

8.433 Br Benoit was working in the O'Brien Institute in the early 1960s when two boys made written statements to the Superior complaining of sexual abuse. The Superior forwarded the statements to the Provincial, requesting that Br Benoit be changed to a day school and that was done. He was subsequently sent to Letterfrack to serve in a senior position in the 1970s.

8.434 To explain his being sent to Letterfrack, the Christian Brothers' Opening Statement commented that the Leadership Team that dealt with the complaints had been replaced in 1966, and only one member of the original team remained on the new team which made the appointment to Letterfrack. The Brother's personal file 'appears not to have been consulted when his appointment in Letterfrack was decided upon'. Finally, it says that there were no records on file of complaints in Letterfrack.

Br Karel

8.435 Br Karel was the subject of a complaint of sexual abuse of boys when he was in Artane in the early 1960s. It was alleged that he had put his hand under the boys' bedclothes and touched them in the genital area. The Resident Manager investigated the allegation and referred the matter to the Provincial. The Provincial interviewed Br Karel, who denied the allegations. Br Karel remained in Artane for some time after these allegations were made, and he was then transferred to a day school outside Dublin. Br Karel testified that he had previously sought a transfer and he did not know whether he was transferred because of the allegation or because of his request.

8.436 The matter was never pursued by the Provincial and so the situation remained that Br Karel was either guilty of serious offences or that a number of boys had made the gravest false allegations. This was a situation that urgently needed to be resolved but the matter went no further.

8.437 Br Karel was later moved to Letterfrack.

8.438 The Christian Brothers explained his appointment on the fact that the Provincial Leadership of 1960 to 1966 had been totally replaced in 1972, and no search in his personal files had been made: 'Consequently, no memory of the original offence existed'. The Congregation noted that, while there were allegations against this man in respect of his time in Letterfrack, there were no contemporary complaints of abuse there.

- 8.439**
- **The Congregation responded to allegations of sexual abuse by transferring Brs Benoit and Karel to day schools and after a period of 10 years they were sent to Letterfrack. The explanation offered in the Brothers' Submission was that it was an administrative accident.**
 - **The suggestion that the Congregation would make an appointment to a senior position in an industrial school without reference to the Brother's recent history or to his personal file is incomprehensible.**
 - **Failure in all these respects by the senior management of the Congregation ignored the safety of the children and the requirement of good management in the institution. A record of sexual abuse would have precluded appointment to a residential school if protecting the boys was the priority.**

Br Dacian⁵³

8.440 Br Dacian was a similar case to the two cited above and the consequences of the Congregation's failure to act to protect children when the first allegation arose were felt for many years by children

⁵² This is a pseudonym.

⁵³ This is a pseudonym.

in different schools. An account of his activities is set out in full in the chapter of this report dealing with St Joseph's Industrial School, Salthill.

- 8.441** Br Dacian was the subject of a complaint of sexual abuse in the early 1960s in Salthill. He was transferred from Galway to a day school in Dublin and was later sent to serve in Letterfrack in the 1970s.
- 8.442** In a letter to the Superior General, the Provincial in Salthill elaborated on the allegation. A child awoke to find someone with his hand inside his pyjamas. Although it was dark the boy identified the person as Br Dacian by his voice and size. Br Dacian admitted doing this, but offered the defence that he was checking to see if the child, who was a known bed-wetter, had wet his bed. The Provincial continued, 'It is apparent that this does not explain everything'. A letter sent three days later to the Superior of the School noted that he was sorry for the lapse of Br Dacian and that all the members of the Council thought that a change was necessary for him, as 'no doubt some of the boys know of this lapse'.
- 8.443** Br Dacian was moved to a school in Dublin less than five months later. He stayed there for nearly 10 years before being moved to Letterfrack.
- 8.444** He spent a year in Letterfrack before moving to another day school in Dublin where he taught for over 10 years. Br Dacian admitted sexually assaulting a boy in this day school and he had to be transferred out of it in the early 1980s. Although it did not emerge until some five years later, another allegation that abuse had occurred at the same time was made by a pupil in an Irish College where Br Dacian was working during that summer.
- 8.445** After his removal from the Dublin day school, he received counselling from a Jesuit priest. This priest gave a somewhat qualified reassurance to the Leadership of the Congregation. He stated that he 'was confident that there is no risk of a recurrence of such an event in the near future by which I mean over the next few years he has had a severe shock'.
- 8.446** Br Dacian was appointed Principal of a rural school in 1984 less than a year after his removal from the Dublin school but, once again, he had to be removed from his position because of his sexual abuse of a young boy in 1987.
- 8.447** He moved to England and, although he continued as a member of the Congregation, he was, according to a letter written in 1994 by Br Travis,⁵⁴ the Provincial, to a concerned teacher from the Dublin school, no longer involved in any ministry that brought him into contact with children.
- 8.448** The Christian Brothers' Opening Statement once more offered the explanation that the Provincial Council from 1960 to 1966 had been totally replaced by a new Council who had no knowledge of the original complaint when the transfer to Letterfrack was made, 'Hence, Br Dacian was sent to Letterfrack without any knowledge of the previous complaint on the part of the new council'.
- 8.449** The Opening Statement made no reference to the fact that this Brother was transferred on at least two subsequent occasions because of sexual abuse of children in his school.
- 8.450** • **Brothers with prior records or allegations of sexual abuse against them were transferred to Letterfrack in the early 1970s.**

⁵⁴ This is a pseudonym.

- **The Submission by the Congregation that the Leadership, when deciding to send them to Letterfrack, did not consult the personal files of these Brothers is somewhat speculative and not based on evidence.**
- **Assigning these Brothers to Letterfrack was indicative of an attitude that sexual abuse was something that happened from time to time, which was unfortunate and potentially embarrassing for the Congregation and the Institution and which had to be handled in a way that lessened the risk of publicity and even prosecution of the offender.**

Oral evidence

8.451 Much of the complainants' evidence relating to sexual abuse has been set out above in the sections dealing with documented cases and respondent evidence. In addition to the two Brothers who were convicted of serious sexual crimes, the cases where sexual abuse was documented or which were confirmed by Brothers and former Brothers can also be regarded as indisputable. Where the evidence of complainants referred to sexual abuse by any of these Brothers, it has been incorporated in the earlier sections dealing with those cases. It does not follow that, where a Brother was found to have committed sexual abuse of boys, every allegation against him was true, and the evidence that is set out relating to these Brothers was given by witnesses whom the Committee considered to be credible and reliable in this respect.

8.452 The locations in which sexual abuse took place, as described by complainants, were mainly the kitchens (where Br Dax worked), the dormitories, the classrooms, and the farm. Br Dax was in sole charge of the kitchens, and the other Brothers did not tend to have business or other occasion to be there. The dormitories were also isolated. This point was highlighted by the evidence of Br Iven concerning an attack which was made on him by a senior boy who made his way to the junior dormitory where this Brother was in charge. Br Iven said that there was nobody else around who might have heard the commotion. It follows that, if a Brother in charge of a dormitory engaged in sexual activity with a boy, he was unlikely to be discovered. These features were conducive to the occurrence of abuse and indicate that it was unlikely that other Brothers would be aware of abuse occurring.

8.453 One witness made allegations against a Br Francois who was in charge of a dormitory in Letterfrack. He described getting a severe beating from this Brother after being ordered out of bed and into the wash hall. He was required to lift his night shirt and *'get it on the bare ... You would suffer from it and it would be violent ... I got it pretty violent down there ... I think I was bleeding'*.

8.454 After the beating he was brought into the Brother's bedroom:

He didn't let me into my dormitory so he took me through the other dormitory down to his room ... The room where he slept, yes. The best way to describe it is he treated my sore bottom, dressed it or whatever.

8.455 When asked whether anything else happened, he stated:

He fondled me, made me put my hand down his pants or in, around his privates and made me masturbate him ... He was getting excited and I had my nightshirt and he came up behind me and ejaculated around my back. Not around my bottom but up around my back. He held me in close to him and ejaculated around my back.

8.456 The witness said that Br Francois made a gesture with his fist as he dismissed him back to the dormitory:

It was meant like (indicating), it's fists for you, just go back and just be quiet about it. I took it like that anyway. That's what I did. I just went back. I was in dread of this man.

8.457 This witness also alleged fondling and touching by this Brother in the classroom and during singing class when the boys would all be standing:

... and lots of times it happened up in the choir, he would be passing along and hand under the leg of your pants and feel your penis or that. Rubbing against you and holding you while you are still singing "all eyes up to the front". That's the way it went.

8.458 The Brother in question denied that this abuse ever took place, both to the Gardaí who investigated allegations against him and to the Committee.

8.459 This witness also made allegations against Br Andre.⁵⁵ He said that Br Andre would question boys individually whether they had any impure thoughts. He said that, while being questioned by Br Andre, he was also fondled by him:

Impure thoughts, that was the key thing, impure thoughts. That covered everything. "Do you have impure thoughts at night?" I said, "No, I don't have anything like that". I probably said something like that. He was talking away and friendly enough. He is sitting down like this and he has you standing next to him there (indicating). In the course of the conversation with him, in the talking with him, he is feeling down towards my penis and that. The conversation is kept going and he said, "Are you telling me the truth, are you telling me the truth, what's happening to you now?" I was getting stiff and hard around the penis so he said, "There is the proof now, you are not telling me the whole truth". That was proof that I wasn't telling the truth and you would have to recant and say, well you did get some kind of impure thoughts at night or whatever, something along those lines. He told me then to, "Remove your pants down, take down your pants, now". I done that.

I took off my pants. Then he would have me leaning over his lap, give me a little few slaps on the bottom. He would be talking to me about impure thoughts and asking me what kind of impure thoughts and he was probing my bottom with his finger, probing me internally in the bottom. I was aware also that while he was doing some of this he was playing – what I accept now that what he was doing was he was playing with himself under his cassock or under his clothes. And that's what happened there.

8.460 The witness was certain that this Brother's name was Andre, but he was unsure whether he was a full-time Brother or a relief Brother. Br Sorel said that this Brother was well known for approaching boys and asking them about sex:

He had that reputation, Br Andre, of doing that particular thing, of talking about the facts of life, so I presume that the lads themselves must have told him ...

It was a normal thing even before he came to Letterfrack, he was well known amongst the Brothers in Scoil Mhuire, Marino for doing the same thing in class ... Talking about the facts of life. It was a kind of a joke amongst us, "he is at it again" ... We thought it was unnecessary. That's what we thought, we thought it was unnecessary. Fellows – normal fellow going to school get these facts of life from their parents. That's how we looked upon it and as a result we were maybe cynical about it.

⁵⁵ This is a pseudonym.

Conclusions on sexual abuse

Incidence

- 8.461**
- 1. Sexual abuse by Brothers was a chronic problem in Letterfrack. Brothers who served there included firstly those who had previously been guilty of sexual abuse of boys, secondly those whose abuse was discovered while they worked in that institution and, thirdly some who were subsequently revealed to have abused boys. A timeline of the documented and admitted cases of sexual abuse shows that:**
 - (a) For approximately two-thirds of the relevant period, there was at least one such abuser working there.**
 - (b) For almost one-third of the years there were at least two abusers present.**
 - (c) There were three abusers present in the institution during at least four different years.**
 - 2. As a matter of probability, more sexual abuse took place than was recorded in the documents or the oral testimony, but it is impossible to ascertain the full extent of such abuse. The reasons for this deduction include:**
 - Two Brothers committed long-term abuse of boys over separate periods of 14 years each. The fact that abuse could continue for so long is a major indictment of the institution. It is unlikely that in a small, closed Community persistent sexual abuse involving many victims could happen over such a length of time without causing suspicion or inquiry on the part of the other Brothers in the Community.**
 - If no suspicions were raised it suggests that relations between Brothers and boys were so inadequate, complaints could not be made.**
 - Other offenders could have been operating undetected in Letterfrack at the same time as the documented abusers notwithstanding the absence of complaint or documentary information.**
 - Most of the victims of the two Brothers who were convicted and sentenced did not come to the Committee to complain. It follows that more abuse happened than was the subject of complaints to the Investigation Committee.**
 - Brothers did not report suspicions about their colleagues.**
 - Reasons for under-reporting by boys were fear of repercussions, fear of being disbelieved, lack of faith that there would be a proper inquiry, feelings of shame and embarrassment, and the fact that sexual abuse is difficult for victims to corroborate or verify.**

Response

- 1. The Congregation did not properly investigate allegations of sexual abuse of boys by Brothers.**
- 2. The Congregation knew that Brothers who sexually abused boys were a continuing danger. It was therefore an act of reckless disregard to send known abusers to any industrial school and, in particular, one as remote and isolated as Letterfrack.**
- 3. The manner in which sexually abusing Brothers were dealt with is indicative of a policy of protecting the Brothers, the Community and the Congregation at the expense of the victims.**
- 4. There was no explanation as to how Brothers who abused boys could have gone undetected in Letterfrack for so many years.**

Peer abuse and sexual activity between boys

- 8.462** The management of the School was under an obligation to ensure that children lived in a safe and secure environment. The failure to detect and prevent physical and sexual abuse constituted a clear failure to provide children with a safe and secure environment in which to live. In addition, the failure to prevent peer abuse by way of sexual bullying also represented a management failure.
- 8.463** The Brothers inadequately understood the distinction between consensual sex and bullying, predatory sexual acts by bigger boys on smaller. This behaviour could be overtly violent and non-consensual, or implicitly non-consensual in the nature of assault because of the age difference or physical difference between the boys. Failure to protect boys from sexual assault constituted a serious management failure where it occurred.
- 8.464** According to the Christian Brothers, a number of Brothers who taught in the School remembered occasions when sexual activity between the boys was discovered. The phenomenon of sexual activity of one kind or another amongst pupils in industrial schools was a feature of life in Letterfrack. The documentary material disclosed a number of instances of sexual activity in the 1930s and 1940s.
- 8.465** In 1940, the Visitation Report referred to the fact that a number of boys were punished for improper conduct. This appears to have been discovered during the course of the investigation into Br Perryn. In 1941, the Visitation Report refers to the fact that:
- Unfortunately for years there has been much immorality among the boys. Onanism and Sodomy have been frequent, and these practices take place wherever the boys congregate, in the play field, lavatories, schools, kitchen and in the grounds. Formerly, the boys were allowed to go out by themselves and then the practices were frequent. Boys wandered away among the fields and roads and immoral practices were carried on.
- 8.466** The Visitor stressed the importance of tight supervision as the only means of curtailing this activity. He noted that:
- A monitor is in charge though one of the monitors was recently carrying on immoral conduct with some of these juniors in the dormitory.
- 8.467** He noted that the Superior had arranged that a Brother should take charge of the boys at all times.
- 8.468** The issue arose again in 1945, in correspondence between Br Aubin and the Provincial, in which Br Aubin criticised the Disciplinarian, Br Maslin, in being overly severe in his punishment of the boys. This case has been discussed above and was a clear indication that sexual activity between boys was a persistent problem in Letterfrack at that time.
- 8.469** One Brother told the Committee that, as Disciplinarian, he was aware of the problem of sexual activity. He said that he was instructed to guard the moral welfare of the boys and to prevent such behaviour. He understood that this was a danger to be guarded against in every boarding school. He came across a number of incidents of sex while in Letterfrack. One day, he saw the tailor leave his shop, so he went in and discovered two boys engaging in sexual activity.
- 8.470** He said that the Disciplinarian would be more aware of the sexual behaviour of the boys. The Resident Manager might have been informed by the Disciplinarian, but this knowledge was not often shared with the rest of the staff. The witness was philosophical in retrospect: *'It is the fairly human failing boys, you could just expect that it would occur again and you just hoped it wouldn't'*.

8.471 Another Brother said that, while he never actually witnessed any sexual contact between the boys, he did recall hearing Br Anatole giving the boys a lecture about the Devil's work, which he presumed was peer abuse. He said that he often saw beds pulled together when he came in to wake the boys up but he never suspected anything untoward. He remembered Br Malleville telling him to be careful of one boy who was coming from Artane because he was a homosexual. He thinks in retrospect that he was telling him to make sure that boy wouldn't be at the other boys. He did recall an incident where a boy approached him and told him that two boys were engaging in sexual activity.

8.472 Br Sorel said that he was aware of the possibility of peer abuse. He recalled one incident where one boy tried to anally rape another boy. That boy reported the matter to Br Guillaume, who punished the offender in front of the other boys in the washroom. He feels that this beating ensured that the message got through to the boys that they were not to engage in such activity.

8.473 Br Karel stated that, although the Brothers were aware of the possibility of sexual activity between boys occurring, he had not witnessed it:

Interfering with each other. Never in my time there did I see or did any of us observe an instance of that. It seemed to me, in my opinion, that that just didn't happen there. If it did, I wasn't aware of it and nobody else ever mentioned it to me.

8.474 One complainant said that another 14-year-old boy sexually abused him. He was a big boy and he abused the witness on a regular basis for four years. The complainant said that he could do nothing except cry and let it happen. He never complained. The abuse only stopped when the other boy left the school. A number of other boys abused him as well, and he stated that he had a number of relationships with other boys when he got older:

I didn't do what he did. I didn't go around and attack and ambush kids or abuse them or rape them ... But what I am saying is I did have one or two – somebody I could talk or sit or read comics and we did have some sort of a – sort of a relationship ... I don't know if I was 13, 14, 15, I don't know. It is just, you know, there was one or two that you would play ball or games or roll around in the hay, you know, just things like that.

8.475 Another witness said that Br Noreis would ask the boys to write down on a piece of paper the names of any boys who were engaging in sexual activity:

He would bring them and sit them down on their desks. Everyone got a sheet of paper and a pencil and we were told to write down if we knew of any boys who had been, shall we say, sexually active with any other boy. Well, I always wrote the same thing down, I don't know what you mean. This always went on a Saturday night. You always missed out on the cinema, because that was the one day that we had a movie. After all these boys had done whatever writing they were doing the paper was collected and we were all sent off to the dormitories, and for the rest of the night you could hear the screaming where boys who had misbehaved were dragged down in their night clothes and flogged by Br Noreis. That went on quite often.

- 8.476**
- **Peer sexual abuse was an element of the bullying and intimidation that were prevalent in Letterfrack and the Brothers failed to recognise it as a persistent problem.**
 - **They punished boys for sexual activity without recognising that younger boys might have been victims of abuse. Because they knew they faced punishment these victims did not report.**

Neglect

- 8.477** As in other industrial schools, the Christian Brothers contend that there was no physical neglect of children in their care in Letterfrack. They concede that the emotional needs of children were not properly provided for but they put this down to ignorance rather than deliberate policy.
- 8.478** In the Introduction to their Opening Statement delivered on 16th June 2005 the Congregation stated that:
- A study of the financial support provided by the State will show that St. Joseph's Industrial School, Letterfrack, was grossly under-funded by the State and that the Christian Brothers had to go to enormous lengths to provide adequately for the needs of the pupils. They ran a farm to provide the necessary food for the institution and sold what remained of the crops to provide for the material and scholastic requirements of the boys.
- The presentation will demonstrate that the boys were well provided for. Nourishing food, good clothing, and adequate shelter replaced the experience of many boys who would have come from conditions of abject poverty.
- ... The Congregation believes that the allegations of neglect are exaggerated and inaccurate and do not reflect the reality that pertained in Letterfrack over the years.
- 8.479** The number of children in Letterfrack was an important part of the story in Letterfrack, as the Congregation have time and again pointed to the low numbers and lack of financial support as the reason why they could not do more for the boys.
- 8.480** Until 1954, the numbers in Letterfrack were reasonably high. From 1937 to 1955, the average number of boys in the Institution being paid for by the Department of Education was about 150. In addition, there were Health Board and voluntary admissions. For example, in 1954, Letterfrack received State grants for 147 boys, although there were 181 boys recorded in the School by the Visitor for that year. Those additional boys were paid for by the Health Boards and by voluntary contributions.
- 8.481** The Congregation in its Opening Statement dealt with the entire period under review (1936–1974) and went into detail in addressing the standard of physical care provided.
- 8.482** With regard to food, the Congregation stated:
- It is quite normal for students to complain of the quality of food served in boarding schools. Letterfrack is no exception to this. However, it must be said that honest efforts were made over the decades to provide balanced fare in sufficient supply.
- The diet in Letterfrack was balanced and healthy. Some of the boys arriving in Letterfrack may not have been used to the regular meals that were served in St. Joseph's, but for most the experience of regular meals could only have been of real benefit. In the course of the history of Letterfrack there were times when the dietary provision was not uniformly good but action was taken in the wake of complaints and the overall judgement of inspectors was that the food was satisfactory.
- The Christian Brothers during their annual Visitation carried out the most vigorous and substantial inspection of the dietary requirements in Letterfrack. Although the Visitor's reports were usually favourable, some reports showed occasional dissatisfaction with the boy's diet and the Visitors were quite forthright in demanding improvement. The quality of the dietary arrangements depended on the competence of the Brother in charge of the kitchen area. Some were less successful than others, and their shortcomings led to them being replaced by a Brother of proven competence.

- 8.483** On the issue of clothing, the Congregation submitted:
- Generally, when the Visitors advert to the boys' clothing, usually in the context of 'smart appearance', their remarks are positive ... The only criticisms appear to concern the need for a change of footwear for farm boy on wet days (1940) and boys going direct to class from manual work without changing (1953) ... The inspectors' reports on clothing point to years when clothing was not good and when improvements were made ... The Tuarim Report (Jan 1966) was very impressed with the way the boys were dressed.
- 8.484** They submitted that by the mid-1960s the boys were well supplied with clothes, boots and shoes, and in the 1970s were fully equipped with modern clothing (walking out suits, overcoats, shirts, and games and football gear).
- 8.485** In regard to accommodation, the Opening Statement described the layout of the Institution in Letterfrack and this is dealt with in the introduction to this chapter. There were two dormitories each capable of accommodating 80 or more beds. Each boy had his own bed, and bed linen was changed regularly. There was a washroom located at the end of each dormitory where the boys washed their face and hands. Showers were taken on Saturday morning in the shower room that was located on the ground floor near the laundry area. The showers were hot initially and then, according to the Congregation, cold water was introduced to close the pores and prevent the boys getting colds. The Congregation submits that some of the boys may not have understood the reason for alternating hot and cold, and some have made complaints that this was a form of torture and this was not the case. After the showers, clean clothes were distributed.
- 8.486** The main toilets were outside the building on the northern side of the playground. There were only two indoor toilets, situated between the two dormitories. The Congregation stated that, after continued complaints at the annual Visitation, this situation was greatly improved in 1961 with the building of additional toilets through the work of the Brothers and the boys.
- 8.487** In its Closing Submissions to the Investigation Committee the Congregation accepted that there were criticisms in a number of Visitation Reports about the standard of the buildings and the quality of accommodation generally but, as the Investigation Committee had heard no complaints about the general quality of the accommodation apart from some complaints about the showers, it was submitted that accommodation was not a matter which seemed to have been of material concern to complainants. They also noted that, in the early 1960s, significant improvements were made to the buildings.
- 8.488** They submitted that the Investigation Committee had no basis for a finding that boys were given food of a poor quality or that it was of an insufficient quantity.
- 8.489** The Investigation Committee has divided the investigation into the provision of care for the boys in Letterfrack into two periods – pre and post 1954.
- 8.490** Letterfrack was not one of the biggest industrial schools but, even during the 1930s and 1940s, the numbers rarely fell below 150 boys and, until 1954, the number under detention was reasonably steady. However, it was smaller than many other institutions and this had implications for the level of funding available. Early Visitation Reports showed the constant struggle needed to make ends meet. Until the mid-1940s, the School incurred losses in each year of its operation. From 1943, things improved and, for the next 10 years, the School managed reasonably successfully.
- 8.491** From 1943 the Visitation Reports show that separate accounts were kept for the House and the School. The House accounts that dealt with the monastery and Brothers' expenses showed that

every Brother in Letterfrack received a salary from the industrial school income (ie mainly the capitation grants). For example, in 1943 when there were 10 Brothers resident in the monastery, £1,000 was paid by way of stipend in respect of Brothers' services. The Brothers did not of course have to pay for accommodation or food out of their salary. The House made contributions to the Christian Brothers' Building Fund during the 1940s – £500 in 1946, and £1,200 in 1948.

8.492 The financial position up to 1953 was summed up by a Visitor in 1953:

Financially you are solvent but it is evident that there is not a whole lot of money to spare when one considers the need there is for expenditure.

8.493 It was not quite as bleak as that, however. In 1954/1955, there was a credit balance of £3,573 and, with the increased funding that had been made available since 1952, the outlook for the Institution was not too bad.

Food, clothing and accommodation pre-1954

8.494 It is noteworthy that the most critical comments about food come from the Visitor and not from the Department Inspector. The Visitor often cited complaints made to him, as opposed to relying on what he witnessed being served. The Inspector could only judge on what she herself witnessed, as the Brothers would not have complained to her and the boys were not given an opportunity to do so. The one area of the Institution that one would expect to see improved for the purposes of an inspection was the food served on the day, and therefore a more complete picture can often be gleaned from the Congregation's own Visitor. Serious concerns were expressed by these Visitors over the quantity and quality of food provided to the boys.

8.495 In 1939 the Congregation Visitor noted that the boys looked frail, under-nourished and pale. The Visitor commented on this fact to the Manager, but was told that the Department Inspector had examined the dietary scale and expressed herself satisfied with it. Later in the same year, the Disciplinarian, Br Leveret, wrote to the Provincial complaining, inter alia, about the fact that the boys were not getting enough bread, butter or milk. At this time, farm produce and tea, sugar, bacon, meal and wheat were being sold locally, and milk was being supplied to local people.

8.496 In 1940, the Provincial received a written complaint from a Christian Brother in Cabra to the effect that one of the boys there, a former resident of Letterfrack, had told him that there was never enough to eat in Letterfrack and that he used to be so hungry that he had resorted to eating turnips and vegetables from the field.

8.497 Later in the year, the farm Brother complained that the boys of the School were the 'worst catered for of any of the five institutions'.

8.498 In 1941, the Visitor reported that many of the staff complained about the manner in which the food was served. They complained that the cabbage was cold, minced meat was served all the time, and the tea was served cold in unwashed cups. The Visitor accepted that this was all true but reported that the quantities served were reasonable. He further noted that the boys would not eat the cabbage because the kitchen Brother used the water trough, which was used for washing the cabbage, as a urinal. The Brother in question, Br Perryn, was a Domestic Brother and had been working in the kitchen in Letterfrack since the late 1920s. The Visitor described him as dirty, untidy and almost repulsive. The kitchen Brother was dismissed as a result of the discovery that he had been sexually abusing boys for many years.

8.499 The Visitor noted that there were 17 milch cows yielding only 14 gallons of milk per day. The boys got around seven gallons, the monastery around three, and three were sold to the village. In 1941, there were 160 boys in Letterfrack and nine Brothers, and yet the boys got barely more than

double the allocation of milk for the Brothers, less than a third of a pint per day. Up to 50 of the boys were under nine years of age.

8.500 The Department Inspector does not seem to have engaged on the issue of food at all. She made no reference to the quantity of milk served, although this was an issue she raised in other schools. In 1943, she described the food as ‘an ample, well balanced and varied diet’.

8.501 In 1945 the Visitor remarked that the 10 Brothers in the monastery were catered for by two female cooks, whilst the boys, who numbered upwards of 165, were catered for by ‘an old man in the place of Br Lafayette who should be in the kitchen’ – Br Lafayette was ill for most of that year.

8.502 Practically all of the clothing worn by the boys was made in the tailor and knitting shops. In the 1940s and 1950s, the Department Inspector made frequent complaints about the quality of the boys’ clothing.

8.503 From 1943 until 1947, the clothing of the boys was described as fairly good but very patched and torn. She was told that boots were difficult to obtain and the boys wore wooden clogs attached to leather uppers. In 1948 the Inspector noted that the quality of the clothing was ‘fairly good’ but that it required a lot of improvement and that the Manager had promised to provide new coats. She did not inspect the School again until 1951. Any improvement in the clothing was not evident, as she again commented ‘a lot of the clothing is patched – I asked the Manager to provide new material for clothes’. Later that year, she found the ‘clothing had improved on the whole’. Clothing was described by the Inspector as ‘fairly good’ in the early 1950s, with no other comments.

8.504 One former resident in Letterfrack in the late 1940s complained that he did not have proper work clothes when he worked on the farm. He was dressed in short pants in freezing weather, working in a bog with no shelter. After his day’s work, there was no possibility of a change of clothes and he had to stay in wet, dirty clothes until the following Friday evening.

8.505 The dampness in the building was regularly commented on by the Visitors in the early 1940s. Neither the School nor the dormitories were centrally heated and, as a result, dampness was a major problem for the Institution. There was a plentiful supply of turf and this provided a heat source, albeit an inadequate one, in the monastery. However, there was not even this basic heating facility in the large, institutional dormitories or recreation areas.

8.506 A major problem that continued for over 20 years was the inadequate sanitary facilities for the boys. In a Visitation Report of 1942 the Visitor noted that:

The lavatory accommodation in the dormitories is very inadequate. There are only two lavatories for the three dormitories. No provision is made for the Brothers or the two foremen who have also rooms off the dormitories. There are at present 170 boys in the Institution.

8.507 In 1948 the Visitor pointed out that the monastery had only two lavatories situated in the upper storey, with no provision for the kitchen and lay staff. The situation was worse in the School:

Far more inadequate is the poor provision made for the boys of the institution. There are only two lavatories in the upper storey for the 153 boys and the three brothers and three laymen who sleep there at night. This is the only accommodation afforded in the whole institution apart from those situated in the schoolyard. This matter required immediate rectification. With slight modification which I discussed with the Br Superior, six or even eight apartments might be supplied in the positions occupied by the present two.

- 8.508** In 1950 the Visitor again commented on the need for more than two lavatories for 180 boys and four workmen in the dormitories. He was told that the Superior had bought the fittings for four more and they were soon to be erected.
- 8.509** Whatever happened to the four fittings bought in 1950 remains a mystery because, in 1953, once again the Visitor remarked that the night toilet accommodation for the boys was entirely inadequate. 'Two W.C's for the whole institution. It would not be very difficult or expensive to increase this to at least half a dozen and the Superior intends to do so in the near future'.
- 8.510** The Superior was written to in 1953 and told to get quotes for new toilets for the boys. It was 1961 before the new toilets were put into the Institution, almost 20 years after the Visitor described the sanitary accommodation as very inadequate.
- 8.511** The absence of adequate fire precautions and the slow response to criticism in the Visitor's report about the fire escape was another problem.
- 8.512** In 1943, 35 children and one adult died in a fire in St Joseph's Industrial School, Cavan and, as a result, fire prevention became a high priority for the Department. Between 1943 and 1952, however, the Inspector consistently described the School fire precautions as follows: 'Fire drill practised regularly, adequate indoor fire exits, night watchman always on duty'. She was clearly incorrect in her assessment.
- 8.513** In 1948 the Visitor noted:
- The fire-escape that leads from the children's dormitory is in my opinion both unsuitable and dangerous. It is a wooden structure put there by some handy-man. It leads straight down from a considerable height and at such a steep angle that should the emergency occur and should there be a rush of children I believe that those who escaped the fire would most probably be dashed to death on the stairs, that is if the stairs were not previously on fire.
- 8.514** Three years later, in 1951, the fire escape in the building again came in for serious criticism and was described as unfit for use and, even if repaired, would be dangerous in an emergency. In 1952 the Department Inspector added one extra piece of information to her usual comments, to the effect that another fire exit has been added to the boys' dormitory.
- 8.515** The funding provided by the State from 1936 to 1954 was sufficient to provide a reasonable level of physical care for the boys. The inadequacies in the care provided were more a matter of bad management than funding.

Food, clothing and accommodation post-1954

- 8.516** Until 1954, Letterfrack was home to three categories of boys: those who were committed through the courts because they were homeless, without proper guardianship, destitute, in breach of the School Attendance Act or guilty of criminal offences; those sent by the local authorities pursuant to the Public Assistance Act, 1949; and boys who were voluntarily admitted by parents or guardians.
- 8.517** On 12th January 1954 the Provincial Council, led by Br O'Hanlon, met with the six Resident Managers of the Christian Brothers' schools. A decision was taken to close one of their schools because of the deteriorating financial position of the industrial schools generally, partly attributed to falling numbers, which had resulted in a decline in income. Carriglea was nominated for closure. A unanimous decision was also taken to segregate juvenile delinquents from other categories of boys, and it was felt that the closure of Carriglea would provide an ideal opportunity to put this plan into effect.

8.518 In his letter to the Superior General, seeking the approval of the Superior Council for these proposals, Br O'Hanlon pointed out that 'the Government does not seem to have any power to prevent us from giving effect to both proposals'. The General Council approved of the plans, and Letterfrack was nominated as the school which in future would house only juvenile offenders. The Department of Education was informed of these decisions by way of letter from Br O'Hanlon on 19th March 1954:

The financial position of the Industrial Schools conducted by the Christian Brothers has been deteriorating over a number of years. One of the reasons for this deterioration is the continuous decline in number of boys being sent to these schools with consequent decline in income.

I have examined the whole position of these schools with my Council and with the six Resident Managers, and I have decided that one of the six schools we control should be closed as an Industrial School. Carriglea Park School is the school which has been chosen for closing ...

I wish, at the same time, to inform you that we have decided to introduce henceforth into our Industrial Schools a certain measure of segregation. We have decided to inform the Resident Managers of Artane, Glin, Tralee and Salthill (Galway) Industrial Schools that they are to take no more boys of the category, "charged with an offence punishable in the case of an adult with penal servitude", but to refer the authorities to the Resident Manager of Letterfrack Industrial School in such cases. Likewise, the Resident Manager of Letterfrack will be directed to take boys of this category only, and to refer the authorities to the other four Resident Managers in the case of boys of other categories.

8.519 A meeting was convened by the senior officials in the Department on 13th April 1954 with Br O'Hanlon and District Justice McCarthy, who presided over the Children's Court in Dublin, to discuss the intended closure of Carriglea and the intention of the Christian Brothers to decline in future to receive boys who were committed for offences liable to penal servitude (if committed by an adult) in any institution other than Letterfrack.

8.520 The Department and the District Justice objected strongly to the plan for Letterfrack, as it would essentially turn it into a reformatory. They argued it was too far from Dublin, where most of the boys came from, and their families, who were often a good influence on them, would find it very difficult and expensive to visit them.

8.521 Br O'Hanlon held the view that it was unfair on boys who had committed no offence to be put in with boys who had, and the Christian Brothers' experience was that one bad apple could ruin 10 good, and that the reverse happened less frequently. He said, by way of compromise with the Department, that they would be prepared to exempt, from classification as offenders, boys guilty of mitching or begging, neglected boys, and boys who were found uncontrollable.

8.522 Br O'Hanlon told the District Justice that it was open to him to send 'offenders' to either Letterfrack, Greenmount or Upton, since the last two were not under the Christian Brothers, and the Judge declared himself satisfied once he had this choice of three schools.

8.523 The Department felt that the only real objection to the proposal was the distance of Letterfrack, Greenmount and Upton from Dublin, and the meeting concluded with a decision to take all possible steps to have non-delinquent children removed from Letterfrack before the majority in the school were delinquents.

8.524 In April 1954 the Department sent District Justice McCarthy a breakdown of the committals to Letterfrack:

According to the figures in this office the total number of boys in the school is 171 of whom 149 are cases committed by the Courts the remaining 22 being 18 Public Assistance cases and 4 voluntaries. Of the 149 committed cases 71 were committed on the grounds of destitution, 48 parent or guardian not exercising proper guardianship; 5 under the school attendance act; 10 for being uncontrollable; 13 larceny cases and 2 for receiving alms.

8.525 Only 13 children were in Letterfrack under the category of an offence punishable by penal servitude if committed by an adult.

8.526 A second meeting was convened by the Department on 14th May 1954 with senior Department officials, Br O'Hanlon and District Justice McCarthy. The meeting was convened because Judge McCarthy had intimated that he would not be prepared to send to Letterfrack the type of boy for whom the School was to be reserved until the non-offenders had been transferred. Again, the Judge pointed out that he was unhappy about the isolated location of Letterfrack, and felt it was unsuitable for the rehabilitation of boys from Dublin city. Br O'Hanlon informed him that this had been fully considered but the Congregation had decided on Letterfrack.

8.527 District Justice Gleeson, based in Limerick, also communicated his concerns to the Minister for Justice in a letter from his court clerk dated 30th July 1954. It stated:

... this arrangement will cause very serious difficulties in administering the Children's Court in Limerick. Hitherto all cases in which committals were made in offence cases were dealt with by committing the boys concerned to Glin, which is near Limerick or Tralee, which is also convenient. It was possible also for the parents of the children to visit them conveniently in these schools, and for the Gardai to take them there quickly and inexpensively. Moreover, the boys in most cases were allowed home to their parents for summer holidays. With Letterfrack over 100 miles away from Limerick all these advantages will cease and serious difficulties will be encountered.

8.528 The Minister for Justice requested the Minister for Education to make representations to the Christian Brothers in line with the Judge's concerns. The Secretary of the Department of Education responded, stating that strong representations had been made to the Provincial Council, but to no avail. The matter was clearly out of the Government's hands.

8.529 The Department of Education wrote to the relevant authorities, including the Departments of Health and Justice, District Justice McCarthy and the NSPCC, informing them of the decision in the following terms:

As you are aware it has been decided by the Provincial of the Irish Christian Brothers that the Industrial School at Letterfrack is to be reserved in future for the boys brought before the Court and found guilty of an offence which in the case of an adult, would be punishable by penal servitude and also for boys against whom there is a police record of such an offence even though they have not been charged with it, but with some other offence such as irregular school attendance, begging, etc.

8.530 They were informed that boys who fell into these categories would no longer be accepted in Artane, Salthill, Tralee or Glin.

8.531 District Justice McCarthy, in a memorandum dated 8th October 1954, recommended a number of changes to the Children Acts, 1908–1949. Amongst his recommendations was that, in cases where a child had not been granted leave of absence during a 12-month period from an industrial

or reformatory school, financial provision should be made to the child's parent or guardian to enable them to visit the child at least once a year.

8.532 He referred to the decision of the Christian Brothers to limit committals to Letterfrack to a particular category and noted that:

this means that the Dublin School [Artane] is now closed to the large number of city boys who come before the Courts for these offences, or in certain circumstances for bad school attendances, begging, etc and they will have to be sent to Letterfrack, to Clonmel Upton, or Greenmount. Week after week parents are calling to the Children's Court at Dublin Castle seeking financial assistance to enable them to visit their children in country districts, children whom they have not seen for very considerable periods because they are unable to pay the necessary fares.

8.533 At the meeting in the Department on 14th May 1954, the number of boy 'offenders' to be left in Letterfrack was also discussed, and Br O'Hanlon said that 85 was the lowest number stated by the School Resident Manager to be required to run the School on anything like an economic basis. It was agreed at the meeting to transfer to Salthill and to Artane and other schools all the Public Assistance cases in the School, together with as many of the other boys as would leave the number of non-transferred boys at 85 and this was to be done by the end of June.

8.534 On 30th June 1954, 179 boys were resident in Letterfrack. Between June and September 1954, 94 boys were transferred to other industrial schools or were released on supervision certificate.

8.535 On 30th September 1954 the Department of Education records showed there were 87 boys resident in Letterfrack. The vast majority of these boys who remained in Letterfrack were there through no fault of their own, but they found themselves in what was effectively a junior reformatory from 1954 onwards. This situation continued until the Kennedy Committee (1970) stated at Section 6.12 of its Report:

No junior reformatory exists for the detention of youthful offenders under twelve these, on conviction, being normally sent to Industrial Schools. As the bulk of boys in this age group are however, sent to the Industrial School at Letterfrack, Co. Galway, it was decided to treat this institution as a junior reformatory.

8.536 At Section 6.15 the Report went on to state that the young offenders who were sent to Letterfrack were not segregated from the non-offenders.

8.537 Some 15 years after the policy had been enunciated by the Provincial, the position in Letterfrack was still unresolved. The Kennedy Report noted that in 1969/1970, 64 of the boys in Letterfrack had been convicted of indictable offences, 15 for non-attendance at school, and 13 were non-offenders. Of those 64, most were incarcerated for offences that would not in fact have incurred imprisonment if committed by an adult, for example trespassing or theft of very small items.

8.538 The policy adopted by the Congregation was to seriously prejudice the boys who were in Letterfrack through neglect or poverty. They were now in a minority in the Institution, but were retained there to provide economic ballast to a system that was incapable of delivering even a basic level of care.

8.539 The fate of these boys in Letterfrack was one of the most shameful episodes in the history of industrial schools. Their individual needs were completely disregarded by the Congregation and the Department of Education. The perceived problem of having offenders and non-offenders in the same institution was never remedied and was actually programmed to continue for the foreseeable future.

8.540 The one positive outcome of the 1954 decision was the removal from Letterfrack of the very young boys who were there. The fate of these children had been a matter of concern to Visitors over the years. Infants under six years of age were taken into Letterfrack: there were 20 in 1941, 18 in 1943, and 12 in 1949. The infirmary nurse did not look after these boys, who were under the care of a Brother. The Visitor remarked in 1949 that, unless the nurse undertook the care of such small children, the Institution should not accept them in the future.

8.541 In his report on Letterfrack for the Congregation, Mr Bernard Dunleavy was very critical of the practice of taking very young children into the School. He quoted a Christian Brothers' document:

The official capacity of the school was 172 pupils. Children who were committed to the school were age 6 to 16 years. That continued to be the case until 1950 when it was perceived by the Christian Brothers that falling numbers in those being admitted to the school would eventually lead to a diminution in the total numbers at the school. In the light of this the Brother Superior, Br Nicolas,⁵⁶ decided to accept a group of children below the minimum age level, the youngest being a mere 4 and a half years old.

8.542 Mr Dunleavy went on to say:

These children were accepted from a County Home, though there is no record of which Home they were accepted from. It is clear that not only was the admission of pupils to Letterfrack not properly monitored, but also that in an effort to maintain the numbers at the school the Christian Brothers were prepared to accept pupils who were far too young to be properly cared for by an institution such as Letterfrack.

8.543 This matter was again raised in 1951, when the Visitor noted:

Some of the children are extremely young when admitted to the institution and Br Sorel has frequently to perform duties which properly speaking should be done by the Matron ... I was given to understand that the Matron was unwilling to look after the very young children.

8.544 Br Sorel who had charge of these infants spoke to the Committee of the strain he was under in caring for them, which he described as 'over-challenging and over-frustrating'. He said that 'There was many a night I went into bed and cried my heart out inside in bed for various reasons'.

8.545 He went on to explain:

In the training college I was trained to teach. When I went to Letterfrack I found out that I had to perform the function of a father, mother, nurse and teacher. I found it impossible.

8.546 Br Sorel said that, when he told the Manager about the difficulty he was having, the Manager said: 'we can't do anything about it, do the best you can. That's what I was told, "just do the best you can." That was as much sympathy as I got'.

8.547 The smaller boys were occupied repairing mattresses or darning and, according to Br Sorel, they were 'happy doing anything'.

8.548 The biggest problem faced was bed-wetting and soiling:

That was one of the worst and soiling the bed. This is the thing that used to break my heart in the morning when I came down to the dormitory ... you would find three or four of the lads would not alone wet the bed but soil the bed. I was really tearing my hair out at that stage ... It was a problem every morning and I used to detest it. I felt like running

⁵⁶ This is a pseudonym.

away myself several times, having to face it coming down in the morning. It was terrible, the stench and the smell.

8.549 Br Sorel received no training or guidance for the task allotted to him in Letterfrack. It was not possible for one young, untrained Brother to care for over 20 very small boys and a further 30 or so boys aged between six and 10 years. The despair and frustration experienced by Br Sorel is indicative of the systemic failure of Letterfrack to deliver even a rudimentary level of care to the small children placed there.

8.550 In 1955 the matter was resolved:

There are now no boys in the establishment under seven years of age. Until last year there were boys of four and three, and there was one of two years six months! The nurse refused to take over their management and she was within her rights in refusing. The departure of the infants to junior orphanages is a great relief to the Brothers and to the infants.

8.551 In a series of interviews conducted by the Christian Brothers in 2001 with Brothers who had served in a number of industrial schools, Br Ruffe⁵⁷ who served as Resident Manager in Letterfrack from 1953 to 1959 described much more starkly the impact the decision to introduce 'segregation' had on Letterfrack.

8.552 He described the reasoning behind the decision by the new Provincial to segregate different categories of boys. He confirmed that the Department of Education and the Justices were not in favour, but the Provincial eventually prevailed upon them that this was to be the future of the industrial schools:

So the Provincial sent me word that in due course I should send off any boys in the school who were not guilty of indictable offences and I should receive only into the school those boys who were indicted. So, on the 4th September, 1954 ('twas I think) I sent off 99 boys from Letterfrack out of the 184. We were left with 85. Now, that immediately left us in a crippling position because the finances in ordinary circumstances were miserably small and we had at least 12 employees. We had a carpenter, a shoemaker, a tailor, a baker, a knitter. We had a laundress. We had three at least, if not four men working on the farm and all of these had to be paid a weekly wage. Now, where it was to come from was your guess as well as mine, but I had to face it. I was promised that the end of the year, Christmas, that I'd get a subvention from the other schools to help out of the difficulty. When I applied for a subvention at Christmas, I was told it was impossible, there was nothing doing. So you can see the position was worrying. It was either close all the shops, dismiss all the employees, but what were we going to do. The boys had no occupation, boys that had no trade, nothing to recommend them when they left the schools. Nothing to help them for a future life when they left school, nothing. So we had to make some attempt to struggle on.

8.553 He went on to describe how a predecessor of his had come up with a 'brainwave' to get extra cash for the School, by chartering a ship and getting a cargo of coal delivered to a small bay near the School, and he sold some of this to the locals and used the rest to run the furnaces. Later, the furnaces were converted to oil but Br Ruffe had to re-convert them back to coal '... and that gave us some form of subsistence. That was the only way we got a little alleviation'. He said the money from the Department was miserably low and it was not possible to keep a living, pay 12 employees, feed, clothe and educate the boys, and provide a trade for them, including purchasing materials and maintaining machinery.

⁵⁷ This is a pseudonym.

- 8.554** Br Ruffe did not get the promised help from the Congregation to support the school after the 1954 decision. The Congregation had sufficient funds to meet the needs of the boys in Letterfrack but it did not make them available.
- 8.555** As outlined in the general chapter on the Christian Brothers, the Christian Brothers' Building Fund accounts for 1954 showed a £300,000 credit balance for the year ending 31st December 1954. There was a balance of £30,000 from Artane and £16,000 from Carriglea, as well as smaller amounts from other industrial schools. According to the Congregation, this represented 'excess funds' from these Communities.
- 8.556** When Br Paget O'Hanlon met the Department he had told the Department that 85 boys was the minimum needed to run Letterfrack. Clearly, this was not the situation and it appears unlikely that the Resident Manager would have told him this.
- 8.557** In his interview, Br Ruffe described the financial difficulties he faced in Letterfrack and the difficulties caused by the Provincial's decision. The farm rarely made a profit, and everything it produced was put back into the school. Similarly, the shops produced little or no income. They generated their own electricity until the ESB⁵⁸ came along, and the cost of switching to the ESB was covered by selling the rights back to the ESB.
- 8.558** The drop in numbers from 184 to 85 was a big financial loss to the school. After the changeover, there was a small trickle of boys, very small in the beginning. Justice McCarthy in Dublin stopped sending them altogether and these were the boys that Br Ruffe was relying on getting and they were not being sent. Other Christian Brothers' industrial schools which were also in financial difficulties, although in his view not as difficult as Letterfrack, were taking in boys that they were not supposed to be taking under the new regime, so he arranged to meet Justice McCarthy. They had a robust discussion in which Justice McCarthy flatly told him he would not send boys so far away from their parents. Br Ruffe explained to the Justice that he thought it could be good for boys to be removed from sources of temptation that landed them in industrial schools in the first place. He felt that Letterfrack had a lot to offer despite its distance, lots of fresh air and country life, giving them an opportunity to re-orientate themselves by means of work, school and education. He pointed out that he himself during his training as a Christian Brother was only allowed one visit per year from his family. He also promised to facilitate parents as much as possible by putting them up overnight or taking the boys into Galway to meet their families when they travelled. He said that the Justice took his views on board and began to send boys to Letterfrack. Unfortunately, Justice McCarthy did not live for too long after this and he had the same problems with his successor. This required another visit to explain the position to him and, following on Justice Ryan visiting Letterfrack to see for himself, he also began to send boys there.
- 8.559** The average number of boys between 1955 and 1969 was 107 and this was not an economically viable number. This number dropped even more dramatically between 1970 and 1973, and there were only 41⁵⁹ boys in Letterfrack shortly before it closed with Br Karel stating that the number had dropped to 11 by the time he left in 1974.
- 8.560** The impact of the 1954 decision, taken by the Congregation in the face of opposition from all other quarters, was felt throughout the subsequent life of the Institution.
- 8.561** In 1954, the Inspector reported that the food was fairly good but was to be improved. She noted that the boys only received bread and tea at lunch. She reported that she had told that Manager to rectify this and to get some modern equipment.

⁵⁸ Electricity Supply Board.

⁵⁹ See table at paragraph 8.21.

- 8.562** In 1955, the Congregational Visitor reported that the boys' diet had improved considerably. The Department Inspector made a number of suggestions regarding the diet to the Resident Manager and noted the food had improved.
- 8.563** By 1956 the effect of the change in finances in the Institution began to become more clear in the reports from Dr McCabe, the Department of Education Inspector, when she noted that 'my suggestions have been brought into operation but still the "old system" is used for cooking – no other facilities'. She made the following general observation:
- Well conducted school on the whole – Of course, there are many improvements I would like to see – better clothes, better living conditions – better cooking facilities – but as usual when I mention these things I am always told – "we have no money" "it can't be done" "get into debt" – so while I realise that expense comes into the argument so long as the boys are reasonably well clothed and fed there is very little else I can do.
- 8.564** The Resident Manager blamed the lack of funds for the poor conditions in Letterfrack and she was in no position to disagree with him. The fact that the financial crisis was caused by the actions of the Congregation itself does not appear to have been appreciated by the Inspector.
- 8.565** Dr McCabe reported that the food was slightly improved in 1957 although 'much remains to be done – old archaic system still in use for cooking – very poor facilities, no modern equipment'. Again she made a general observation:
- Well conducted school on the whole – I would really like to see a number of improvements here – clothing, living conditions and cooking arrangements. I have often made suggestions but each time I feel up against a stone wall as always I am told – increase the grant – give more money and of course I realise their difficulties – but all the same I will have to insist on better conditions for the boys. Br Ruffe the Resident Manager is very argumentative and difficult to persuade.
- 8.566** In 1957 and 1958 the Congregation Visitor reported that the boys' food had improved since Br Delmont,⁶⁰ who was interested in his work and did his best to provide good meals to the boys, had taken over the kitchen. Dr McCabe was pleased to see in 1958 that an Aga and new steam boiler had been installed in the kitchen.
- 8.567** The situation in Letterfrack had reached an all-time low by 1959. Br Ruffe, the Resident Manager, had been hospitalised for 18 months and, to use his own description in 2001, 'was practically an invalid'.
- 8.568** Br Adrien had taken over the kitchen, and the Visitor in his Report of 1959 stated that the boys' diet needed to be looked into. He highlighted that they received bread and tea for dinner three days a week, and that they got very little meat, 'never getting anything in the nature of an Irish stew'. He further stated that the cooking and serving of the boys' food was not satisfactory. As regards breakfast he stated the boys received an egg one day a week, with porridge served five days per week. However, he noted that the quantity served was insufficient, with each boy receiving only a saucer full. He highlighted that the Sunday food was 'the worst of the week'. He stated that the only redeeming feature was that twice a week the boys were served two sausages each in the evenings. He noted that Br Adrien was wholly unsuccessful in his running of the kitchen, and that Br Adrien placed the blame on the Superior whom Br Adrien said restricted his budget. On enquiring into the matter, however, the Visitor discovered that Br Adrien was running the kitchen in a most expensive manner, buying meals from shops as opposed to preparing them in the kitchen. The Visitor concluded by noting that, in order for the boys to be happy at Letterfrack, 'the food must be improved'.

⁶⁰ This is a pseudonym

8.569 In 1959, the Provincial wrote to the acting Manager and told him that he had visited the Resident Manager who was convalescing, and complained to him about the small quantities of porridge which the boys were provided with, and the fact that the boys had three meatless days in a week. Br Ruffe told the Provincial that he believed it to be only two days a week without meat. The Provincial asked Br Malleville, who was Disciplinary in Letterfrack, to inquire into this discreetly and discover whether the boys had been having three dinners of bread and tea over a long period. He also said that the issue of the meat was one that required an immediate remedy. This internal inquiry found that the boys received meat every day, and the only days they would not have meat was during Easter and fasting days.

8.570 Br Malleville's word appears to have been taken and no further enquiries were made about the extremely serious situation described by the Visitor.

8.571 The 1959 Visitation Report that criticised the boys' food said of the Brothers' diet:

The Brothers food is very well cooked and neatly served. It is also ample. The Brothers were all very satisfied.

8.572 In that same year a complaint was received from a parent about the quality of food and clothing in Letterfrack. A letter was sent on 5th August 1959 from a TD to the Minister for Education describing how the woman's son was one of five boys who had absconded from Letterfrack, broken into two other schools and stolen food from one of them. The boys were recaptured, charged and sent to Daingean. The mother said the boys complained about the food they were getting in Letterfrack. The Resident Manager was written to on 20th August and he responded on 25th August 1959:

The food supplied to the boys in the school is always plentiful, fresh and wholesome; [The boy's mother] visited the school on a number of occasions while her son was here and made no complaints ... Dr McCabe visits the school, unannounced, periodically and she always sees the boys at their meals and she has never made any complaint about the food served. The boys' menu is:-

Breakfast: Porridge or luncheon roll, tea, bread and butter or margarine Eggs one morning each week.

Lunch: Tea, Bread and Jam

Dinner: Fresh beef or mutton, potatoes vegetables (cabbage, turnip, parsnips, carrots,) soup and dessert (3 times weekly)

Tea: Tea , bread and butter or margarine

With regard to butter and margarine the boys have their choice. At tea also the boys have sausages (fresh) twice a week.

8.573 Dr McCabe was in complete agreement with the Resident Manager that the food was 'plentiful, fresh and wholesome' and, in a handwritten note to the Inspector, she stated that she did not agree with the statement made by the mother about the food served.

8.574 Also in 1959, an Englishman visited the School and noticed that the boys were playing football in their bare feet. This gave rise to a critical article in a Sunday newspaper, which identified inadequate funding of industrial schools as an issue of some concern. Representatives of the Congregation met with Department officials who were anxious to refute the article. The Christian Brothers sent a letter to the paper, explaining the lack of footwear as being due to an exceptionally hot day and stating that ordinarily boys wore boots or sandals.

- 8.575** The Congregation did not avail themselves of the public interest in the matter to confirm their own view that industrial schools were inadequately funded but rather went to some trouble to support the Department of Education's contention that funding was adequate.
- 8.576** The Department received another complaint in August 1959. (Details of this complaint are dealt with above in connection with food as the main complaint related to food.) The mother concerned also complained, inter alia, about the clothing supplied to the boys. The Resident Manager responded to that portion of the complaint in the following terms:
- The boys' clothes are kept clean as far as is humanly possible. The boys' day shirts, singlets and trunks are washed weekly and inspected in the dormitory each morning. Clothing for the year 1958 totalled £1,235 – 17 – 4, which gives an average of over £12 per boy for the year.
- 8.577** Again, the Congregation defended the clothing provided instead of taking the opportunity to further advance their case for increased funding.
- 8.578** In 1961, the Congregation Visitor noted that the boys' food had improved markedly of late and that it was now 'well up to the standard of similar Institutions'. The Congregation Visitor noted that a good variety was served and that the boys were better fed than in the past. He also noted in the Visitation letter that there would be greater variety when the funding improved.
- 8.579** Later in the year the Department Inspector noted that the boys' food had improved, stating that better cooking facilities were now in place. She made a general observation that the boys were well cared for, despite the adverse conditions. The Brothers were doing their best in very difficult circumstances and in very primitive conditions. There were 111 boys in the Institution at this time.
- 8.580** Throughout the 1960s, the report about food continued to record that the food had improved in Letterfrack.
- 8.581** The Interdepartmental Committee on the Prevention of Crime and Treatment of Offenders visited Letterfrack in December 1962. Rather surprisingly, the Working Party did not see a meal being served but was prepared to accept the Resident Manager's word that the food was good.
- 8.582** The Committee Secretary described the clothes and footwear provided as sufficient, although he criticised the absence of overcoats for the boys, which he saw as a serious deficiency. However, the Committee accepted that additional income would be necessary if adequate clothing and footwear were to be provided.
- 8.583** Following the Committee's visit the Resident Manager wrote to Mr McDevitt in the Department of Education on 31st December 1962, saying that a new oven had been purchased and that 'I have already purchased about 50 tweed and gabardine overcoats for the boys and I hope to have one for each boy in the very near future'.
- 8.584** He went on to say:
- I hope we will soon get an increase in the Maintenance Grant it would help to pull down my overdraft, and if I had about 20 more pupils I should then be in a position to do more for the boys. We get several applications for vacancies but very few are committed.
- 8.585** There were 128 boys in Letterfrack in 1962.
- 8.586** Department Inspectors continued to stress the need for improvements in the quality of clothing provided well into the 1960s and conditions did improve slowly.

- 8.587** In 1966, Dr C.E. Lysaght carried out the general inspection. He stated that the School menu provided a 'well balanced diet and variety'. He noted that the dinners, which he witnessed during his inspection, were 'ample', 'satisfactory' and that 'little food was left behind'.
- 8.588** In 1970, the Congregation Visitor reported that the boys now had modern clothing and sporting gear.
- 8.589** In the second Visitation carried out in 1970, Br Dax was singled out for further praise. The Visitor noted that Br Dax who had taken over the kitchen had a different menu each day of the week and that the meals served to the boys were 'very ample and tastefully served'.
- 8.590** The 1972 Visitation Report stated that the food was satisfactory and commended Br Dax for his efficiency: 'it would be impossible to equal his dedication and efficiency'. In the 1973 Visitation Report the Visitor stated:
- Br Dax the Sub-Superior, lives an almost eremetical life since he supervises all the boys' meals seven days a week and consequently must eat by himself. He is regular and his meals keep the boys contented. He does not cook but does the ordering and supervising. His only other duty is to supervise the boys' showers. He maintains good discipline though his methods may be a little crude at times. He seems ripe for a total change of environment and the visitor suggests that he might be a suitable candidate for the international tertianship next August.
- 8.591** A number of former residents complained about the clothing they received. Some of these complaints related to the absence of proper work clothes. Boys who worked part-time on the farm (up to 40 at any time) had no work clothes. They wore their school clothes on the bog and in the fields in all weather and, no matter how wet or mucky they got, they had to stay in the same clothes until the end of the week.
- 8.592** One former resident said that he occasionally worked on the farm. Although he had Wellington boots he did not have proper work clothes like the boys who worked there full time. He wore his normal school clothes.
- 8.593** Another resident present in the Institution in the late 1950s and early 1960s said that he received so little food that he was reduced to eating swedes out of the fields. He contrasted the food the boys received with that of the staff. He said that:
- I actually seen the table in the monastery one time and there was enough food on that table to feed the 120 lads that were in that school. We never got food, anything like that. There was so much sheep and cattle and vegetables that were in that school, we should have been all little barrels.*
- 8.594** One resident from the early 1960s said that the quality of the food was awful and that there was never enough of it. Another resident from the late 1950s said that there was never a lot of it and that boys would trade food they did not like. One resident in the late 1960s said that, of all the institutions he was in, Upton, Daingean and Letterfrack, the food in Letterfrack was the worst.
- 8.595** Another resident present in the late 1960s and early 1970s stated:
- The food wasn't good food ... I remember kids breaking out in scabies and all sorts of stuff, weak and pale. It was very cheap food from Galway City, I don't know where they got it from. The porridge, on many occasions it was very weak stuff and we used to pick little worms out with the spoons. The bread used to come in at the time, we used to be picking bits of green mould out of it and stuff, fighting for a small piece of margarine on*

the table to spread on it. It was just like animals, dog eat dog stuff, but I don't remember any healthy food.

8.596 Br Dax was employed as the cook in Letterfrack from the late 1950s until it closed in 1974. In his evidence to the Investigation Committee he stated that:

I would say quite honestly as far as I am concerned the food was reasonably good.

- 8.597**
- The 1954 decision of the Provincial, taken in the face of opposition by both the Department of Education and District Justice McCarthy, was ill-considered and detrimental to the welfare of the boys in Letterfrack.
 - If it was desirable to restrict admission to Letterfrack to a specific category of boys, it was unreasonable and contrary to policy to retain a substantial number of boys from previous intakes who were outside that category.
 - By insisting that increases in grants had to be applied equally to all schools, smaller institutions like Letterfrack were at a serious disadvantage. It required extra funding to compensate for the low numbers after 1954 but no special case was made.
 - It was an indictment of the Congregation that extra funding promised to the Resident Manager to compensate for the removal of up to 100 pupils was refused at a time when funds were available. The deprivation of funds caused hardship to the boys in Letterfrack.
 - The decision to close Carriglea as an industrial school and to keep Letterfrack open was not taken in the interests of the children in Letterfrack. The unsuitability of Letterfrack as an industrial school was apparent from the start and was strongly reiterated by District Justices and by the Department of Education. The will of the Provincial prevailed, however, and it is an example of the power the Christian Brothers had in determining the direction the industrial school system took.
 - From the comments in her Inspection Reports, Dr McCabe believed that low standards were the inevitable consequences of inadequate funding. However, when this issue was raised in public in 1959, neither the Department nor the Congregation acknowledged the difficulties but were at pains to paint a rosy picture of life in Letterfrack.
 - The argument put forward by the Congregation in its Opening Statement, that the care the boys received in Letterfrack was better than they would have received if they had remained in their families, misses the point. The Congregation was paid by the State to care for these boys to a standard set down by law, and failed to do so.

Education pre-1954

8.598 All industrial schools were required to provide a basic national school education for all boys under 14 and an appropriate level of industrial training for the older boys. Letterfrack was recognised as a national school in 1941 and was required to follow the national school curriculum. All boys under 14 attended classes for five hours per day, and those over 14 years old who had completed the 6th class course were put full-time to a trade. Those still in 6th class and who could be expected to benefit from it remained on to complete the year, and the others who were put into a trade received evening classes in the 'three R's'.

8.599 In their Final Submission the Congregation submitted that the evidence heard by the Investigation Committee confirmed that teaching in Letterfrack was extremely difficult, principally because the boys had received little or no education before arriving in Letterfrack and because they were not interested in education. This difficulty, they submit, was compounded by the State's failure to recognise this, in not providing extra teaching staff and not allowing the Congregation to pursue a modified curriculum which was more suitable for the boys. The Congregation even provided for

one extra teacher from their own resources at one stage. Despite the difficulties, they submit that the Congregation brought a high proportion of boys to Primary Certificate level and, for a period, organised for some boys to attend secondary school.

8.600 They accept that some boys did not benefit from an education but submit that part of the reason for this was their own lack of interest in education. They submit that there was no basis for a finding that the Congregation was guilty of any shortcoming in respect of the provision of education to boys within its care.

8.601 These assertions can be tested against the documentary evidence, the evidence of former Brothers, and the evidence of former pupils of the School.

8.602 The Visitation Reports up to 1954 do not support the contention that the boys were backward or unwilling to receive education. Although some Brothers were criticised from time to time as being poor teachers, on the whole the standard as recorded by the Visitors was good. In 1938 the Visitor made an important observation:

poor children of our institutions have first claim on our really good teachers, as their school time is short indeed, and we were founded mainly to look after the education of poor boys.

8.603 The School was staffed mainly by Christian Brothers. The size of the teaching staff varied. For much of the 1940s and 1950s, there were three to four teachers in the School. Some of these individuals taught two classes together. As regards qualifications, the Congregation's teachers were trained in its own teaching college. Some former members of staff complained of the lack of training they received in remedial or special needs teaching. This, they said, was a significant handicap in Letterfrack, as many of the methods that they had learned were designed to be utilised in mainstream schools and were of little use in a school of such mixed ability as Letterfrack.

8.604 In 1945, the Visitor criticised the practice of removing weaker students from school to work on the farm. He suggested that the permission of the Superior be secured before this was allowed to happen.

8.605 Br Sorel, who taught in Letterfrack for four years from the late 1940s, said that the job was difficult as many of the children suffered from educational disabilities:

It was a tremendous experience in one way, but it was very frustrating in another because a lot of the kids in the classes, as pointed out last week, were bordering on the mentally handicapped.

8.606 There was no evidence that, during Br Sorel's time there, Letterfrack had a large number of mentally handicapped children. Educationally deprived they undoubtedly were, and for many the trauma of being locked away from family and friends would have been deeply disturbing, but judging by the complainants who attended the oral hearings, they were not mentally handicapped.

8.607 There was not a great deal of evidence about the standard of education in Letterfrack prior to 1954, when the School changed its enrolment policy. The only contemporaneous records, the Visitation Reports, were generally positive about the School.

8.608 Complainants to the Committee did not share the Visitor's views, and described a regime of corporal punishment in the classroom that was harsh and pervasive.

Education post-1954

8.609 From 1954, Letterfrack was directed by the Provincial of the Congregation to receive only those children who had been found guilty of a criminal offence. The negative impact that this decision

had on the care of the boys has already been outlined. It had a considerable impact on the education of the boys in Letterfrack. The position was succinctly put in 1956 by the Resident Manager, who wrote to the Provincial informing him of the low level of educational ability of the students:

The change in condition in our school brought about two years ago has altered all that radically. The old hands, if I may call them so, have become the 'intelligentia' and the new pupils are in a state of ignorance that has to be experienced to be realised. Of the 41 boys, still here who have been admitted in the last two years, 35 are still in school. This is more than half the number of boys on the rolls (61). These boys, in the main do not even know the letters of the alphabet.

- 8.610** He noted that there were three classes in the school: 3rd, 4th and 5th class. He said that 4th class was divided into three groups: 1. Boys who did not know the letters of the alphabet; 2. Boys who did know the letters of the alphabet; and 3. Boys who had begun to realise the simplest of words. He stated that these groupings were absolutely necessary and that the age groups threw further light on the state of affairs. Those in the so-called 4th class had an average age of 11 years 9 months, and those in 5th, 13 years and 1 month. He stated that it was abundantly clear from the above facts that specialised teaching was an absolute necessity if these boys were to get even the most rudimentary education. He said that the services of the three Brothers with the best of qualifications were therefore vitally needed in the school.
- 8.611** The Congregation presented a table of the number of boys who sat for and passed the Primary Certificate. This table does not tally with the Visitation Reports for a number of years and cannot therefore be relied on.
- 8.612** In 1956, seven out of 10 boys in 6th class were presented for examination and obtained their Primary Certificate.
- 8.613** In 1957 the teachers had been reduced to three, as numbers were falling in the school. There were 71 boys in school that year, 14 of whom were in 6th class; 10 were presented for Primary Certificate, and one boy obtained a scholarship. Both the Visitor for that year and the Provincial believed that the effort of getting one or two boys to pass the scholarship exam was not worth it and so the practice was discontinued. Boys were still sent to Clifden CBS for secondary education, but no more than a dozen attended at any time.
- 8.614** As in all industrial schools, the Christian Brothers selected the boys who would be presented for the Primary Certificate from 6th standard. Only those boys who were deemed capable of passing were put forward and, therefore, the pass rate was artificially high. For example, in 1958 there were 16 boys in 6th class, and 11 sat the exam. Therefore, although the results were good as a percentage pass rate, this cannot be taken to be representative of the school as a whole.
- 8.615** Two important factors were significant in education in Letterfrack: first, children did not progress through the various classes in Letterfrack as they did in other national schools. The criterion for advancement in this school was ability. Children who were educationally disadvantaged were placed in a class appropriate to their standard and were allowed to progress to an age-appropriate class at their own pace. Consequently, class sizes decreased in the higher classes.
- 8.616** Br Dondre, who was in Letterfrack in the late 1960s and early 1970s, described this process to the Committee. He said that he taught the weakest group, and classes were allocated by the school Principal, who determined the boys' ability on entry:

I taught the weakest class and I can only go on my own experience in the classroom situation. The weakest boys were very weak. I did two remedial courses when I was there

... to improve my knowledge about weaker kids and the methodology of teaching these weaker children. I was quite happy with my results I could pass kids through my classroom, from 3rd class. There was a great mobility as I said before, I could get kids from my classroom into the next class inside three or four months because they were intelligent, all they needed was regular schooling. There were some kids that never graduated from the bottom two classes, some of them were educationally backward and some of them would be bordered on being mildly mentally handicapped.

- 8.617** The second factor that had a significant impact was that class sizes were comparatively small – smaller than those in outside national schools.
- 8.618** In 1960, the Visitor noted that the average class size was uneconomic, ‘but that nothing could be done about it until such time as the numbers rise’. He further stated that the present staff of three should, ordinarily, be teaching double the number of pupils.
- 8.619** In 1961, Br Guillaume wrote to the Department informing it that the boys admitted to Letterfrack were educationally challenged in that most of them, on admission, were unable to read or write. He stated that the Brothers in the school were doing their utmost to ensure these boys, at the very least, were able to read and write, add and subtract before they left the Institution and, to this end, had appointed an extra teacher to the school which he asked the Department to sanction. The Department recognised the extra teacher as a classroom assistant, but did not sanction two further classroom assistants as requested.
- 8.620** In 1962, the Interdepartmental Committee on the Prevention of Crime and Treatment of Offenders visited the school. The Working Party reported that, as boys entering Letterfrack were below the normal educational standard for their age, they required more individual attention than their national school counterparts. The Committee recommended smaller class sizes and more intensive instruction in English and arithmetic.
- 8.621** A Department of Education official followed up on the Interdepartmental Committee, with a more thorough investigation into the education provided in Letterfrack, and reported in 1963.
- 8.622** His report identified the uneven age profile in the classes as ‘a most unsatisfactory state of affairs’ although, by the time the boys reached 6th form, the age disparity with outside national schools had been reduced from two and a half years in 3rd form to 6 months. In June 1962, 34 of the 91 pupils who had reached the age of 14 had not moved on to 6th class. The report noted that the prevailing standard at the time was rated as ‘satisfactory’. It noted that, in former years, ‘allowances had to be made ... for adverse circumstances’. These included inadequate buildings, equipment and teachers and the ‘depressing surroundings’, as well as the priority given to work in the Institution over classes.
- 8.623** The report went on to say that ‘If any of the above factors still operate there would be a lowering of educational attainments’. Each of the factors listed above could be readily identified by the Inspector and it is not clear why the report was phrased in this way. What is clear is that each of these suggestions was within the remit of the management of the School and was deemed to be ‘desirable’ if not ‘essential’.
- 8.624** The report noted the possibility that the Christian Brothers had ‘not made the best possible staff available in Letterfrack’, and highlighted the fact that many Brothers seemed not to care to work there. Of particular concern was the fact that there was a very frequent turnover of teaching staff which, it stated, would ‘militate against achieving good educational results’. Also of concern was the lack of experience of some of the teachers in the School. The report highlighted that the youngest of the teachers had only been at the School for six months. The report expressed

concern that this teacher had not yet received his diploma, and questioned whether such an inexperienced teacher should have been sent to a school where so many educational problems had to be faced in his daily interactions with the pupils.⁶¹

- 8.625** Significantly, the Inspector noted that the Manager had reported to the Interdepartmental Committee that 'only 2 out of 114 boys (were) below average intelligence' and he agreed with this assessment. The problem, therefore, was not the intelligence of the boys but their lack of educational opportunity before being sent to Letterfrack.
- 8.626** Throughout the 1960s the Visitors noted the difficulty of teaching the boys who were coming to Letterfrack because of their severe educational disadvantage prior to coming there. One of a number of Reports compiled in the 1970s was highly critical of the standard of teaching in the School. Of the five teachers there, only one was qualified, three had completed one year of training in Marino, and a fifth had no qualifications at all.
- 8.627** The 1972 Visitation Report criticised the Principal. It stated that his abilities fell 'short of the very high standard required to deal with the disturbed children' that were admitted. It also noted that 'most of the boys are very much retarded'. The Visitor expressed concerns at the class sizes, suggesting that an extra teacher would be required to cater for the needs of the boys. He further reported that many of the boys were in need of remedial teaching, something that was impossible to provide with the structure in place. He stated that this problem was further compounded by the fact that 'neither Br Thibaud⁶² nor Br Arnaud⁶³ are very efficient teachers, at least for boys of this kind'.
- 8.628** In the same year, three members of staff wrote to the Provincial complaining about the education provided. They stated that the educational set-up that prevailed in the Institution was 'grossly inadequate to meet the educational requirements' of the type of boy found there. They concluded by stating that, were the staff shortages not remedied, the Province would be 'failing in the real work of Edmund Rice', and further expressed their view that 'the school should be closed immediately if the ... situation is to prevail'.
- 8.629** A Department of Education report later in the year made a number of recommendations to remedy the problems facing the staff in Letterfrack, including having the children professionally assessed. Importantly, this report recognised the need to compensate children in industrial schools for the fact that they were there. Among its many recommendations it stated:
- It would be necessary to provide children in care with more than the normal educational facilities. It would, in other words, be necessary to overcompensate for deprivation.
- 8.630** It also recommended specialised training and a more holistic approach to the care of these children. Thinking had at last begun to move on.
- 8.631** The fundamental problems of maintaining a school like Letterfrack were confronted in the 1973 Visitation Report. It noted that many of the boys in the School were 'emotionally disturbed', some of them were 'mentally retarded', with others being 'backward' on entering Letterfrack. It reported that the Brothers were conscious of the fact that they lacked the professional training required to deal with such boys' schooling, and that the remoteness of the Institution rendered it impossible to get the professional help that the boys required.

⁶¹ Cross-reference to CB General Chapter where notes that this arrangement was with the agreement of the Department of Education.

⁶² This is a pseudonym.

⁶³ This is a pseudonym.

8.632 Another concern was the need to provide higher education to the boys aged 14 to 16, which one Visitor in the 1960s stated could not be done without ‘special concessions’ being granted by the Education Office.

Evidence from complainants

8.633 One witness present in the early 1970s stated that he attended school but never sat his Primary Certificate. He said that some of the older boys got the opportunity to attend the vocational school in Clifden, but he never got the opportunity to go as this arrangement ceased for no apparent reason.

8.634 By comparison, some pupils felt they received a good education and liked school. One boy said that he had received a good education prior to being sent to Letterfrack. He said that he got on all right in the school. The experience of members of the same family was not always the same. The Committee heard from three siblings, one of whom felt that the education he received in the school was all right, and whose brothers did not feel they received an adequate education.

Evidence from respondents

8.635 A number of the individual respondents who gave evidence taught in the national school and they were all agreed that the standard of education in the school was bad.

8.636 Br Francois described it as pretty poor:

The standard of education? It was pretty poor compared to a group on the outside that were of the same age would have been much more advanced.

8.637 Br Michel confirmed that teaching in the school was very difficult:

Well progress was very slow. The boys came to us and they were assessed for a class that best suited and then they went up as they progressed. I assure you it was a slog in the classroom, they didn't want to learn most of them, they weren't used to being in school they weren't used to sitting at a desk all day long.

8.638 He also felt that the curriculum was not appropriate. He said that one aspect was that the Department Inspector:

made no effort to give us a little programme for these boys who were educationally neglected in the past. We had to slog at the full programme of a primary school even so far as getting the boys to say the words in Irish as they would in the western dialect.

8.639 Br Telfour, who was there from the mid to late 1960s, also stressed the low educational standard of the boys upon entry into the school. He said that, over time, some of the boys would improve and progress through the classes, eventually ending up at secondary school in Clifden. Other boys might make little or no progress.

8.640 Br Rainger, who was there around the same time, said that he found teaching in the school quite frustrating as he was unable to apply the methods he had been taught in training college because of the low standard of education possessed by the boys:

Probably one of my frustrations in Letterfrack was frustration in the classroom, that I couldn't apply the teaching methods that would have been applied, if you don't mind me using the phrase, to normal children, because a lot of these people would have been educationally deprived, lack of reading ability and so on and so forth, and I found teaching in Letterfrack challenging, to say the least.

8.641 He said that many of the boys made little progress:

I would personally describe it as minimal. It was a real slog and a real challenge just to get across even the basic concepts. Now having said that, that is across the board. There could have been exceptions.

8.642 Br Dondre described the disturbed nature of the boys:

The boys in Letterfrack were disturbed. How will I say this? If they weren't disturbed before they got to Letterfrack, they were disturbed when they got there. The fact of taking a boy from his home and sending him to an industrial school in some cases, and dragging him through criminal proceedings, through court, and being sentenced by a Justice to four/five/six, in some cases seven years, away from their home, was enough to disturb anybody. Some of them were disturbed, they came from disturbed backgrounds and they were there because they were disturbed. They were there because they were in trouble. Some of them were no trouble at all. The very fact of sending them there, they did become disturbed, they became sort of unhappy and quiet – not quiet – into themselves, introverted. Generally unhappy.

8.643 Br Blaise⁶⁴ said that teaching in the school was difficult, as the constant arrival and departure of boys all the year round made it difficult to teach the curriculum.

8.644 The Congregation was cognisant of the difficulties faced in teaching children in the school, and the documentary material was replete with examples of this. However, this is not to totally exculpate the Congregation. The Congregation did not send its best teachers to the school. Many of the teachers came straight from teacher training college with little experience of teaching in a normal school, not to mention a school like that in Letterfrack. It is interesting to compare two documents from the discovered material, one from the start of the period of investigation and one from near the end.

8.645 In 1938, the Congregation Visitor noted that the:

poor children of our institutions have first claim on our really good teachers, as their school time is short indeed, and we are founded mainly to look after the education of poor boys.

8.646 The Congregational response to this plea was poor. The 1963 Report on education noted that:

- The Brothers had not made the best possible staff available in Letterfrack.
- They lacked experience.
- There was a very high turnover of teaching staff.
- Many Brothers seemed not to care to work in Letterfrack.

- 8.647**
- **The submission by the Congregation, that it was not to be faulted for any shortcoming in respect of educating the boys in its care, was not supported by the evidence.**
 - **Smaller class sizes and grading according to ability should have formed the basis for real educational opportunity for boys who had missed out on schooling in their early years. However, the poor quality of the staff sent to Letterfrack, particularly in the later years, made progress in this area virtually impossible. The reports from the 1960s and 1970s, indicate how far thinking had developed in the care of these children, but similar advances were not made in the training or guidance offered to young Christian Brothers.**

⁶⁴ This is a pseudonym.

- Children who are badly fed, badly clothed, cold and lonely cannot thrive in any school environment. The ‘overcompensation’ mentioned in the 1970 Department of Education report was never applied in Letterfrack.
- The assertion by some ex-Brothers, that most of the residents in Letterfrack were of impaired mental capacity, was not borne out by the complainants who attended the Investigation Committee. They were capable men for the most part who could have progressed in the right environment. The resentment and regret felt by many of them at the loss of opportunity were palpable even 50 years later. Teachers tended to confuse poor education with mental incapacity and that had a negative impact on the education provided in Letterfrack.

Training and trades

8.648 The Congregation accepted that the level of industrial training provided was not sufficient:

It would be fair to say that the training in the various trades was not really satisfactory for a number of reasons. Because of the remoteness of the institution, it was almost impossible to attract trade teachers to work there ... Then many of the trades were not accessible to boys who had not come through the normal apprenticeship. In addition, vacancies for the various trades were not readily available in the local area, and Dublin probably had its own supply of tradesmen. Moreover many of the techniques for the trades were outdated and consequently did not prepare the young people adequately to enter into a trade ... and finally, in response to the criticism that the workshops and the farm did not give adequate instruction in the trade as well as giving practical experience, it should be stated that the normal practice in the training of any trade was to have the young people do the most simple of tasks initially and then to learn by “doing the job”.

8.649 It continued:

By far the largest percentage of the boys who over 14 years of age, worked on the farm, seasonally augmented after school hours by a large number of senior school boys ... The reason given for this labour intensiveness was the nature of the land (mostly mountain), which is poor and can be tilled only with the spade ... in a report on the occupational training provided ... it was pointed out that farming was “the most natural and suitable employment for the boys”... The Report expressed disappointment with most of the residential school farms because they generally failed to teach farm management to the boys. They did not train the boys in farming but simply considered them as “juvenile labourers”. It would seem that the reason for this was the lack of people knowledgeable in the theory of farm management.

8.650 Trades were determined by the needs of the Institution and, for a small minority of boys who were lucky enough to be employed in an area of the School that offered future job prospects, this was an undoubted benefit. For example, one ex-resident who was in Letterfrack in the late 1950s spoke of the valuable experience he got working in the gardens and looking after the glasshouse. He said it opened up a *‘terrific kind of a job for me’*. He had great freedom and he loved the work. Later on, he was put on the poultry farm with Br Dax. He said he learned everything to do with poultry farming, he liked it and he was good at it because he was interested in it.

8.651 Gardening could have provided a reasonable prospect of work for trained boys but, because the Institution only needed one or two gardeners, that is all that were trained. Only that number received training.

8.652 Another complainant, who was resident from the late 1940s to the mid-1950s, said he worked in the bakery for a year or so and, following his discharge, he finished up working in a bakery in a

neighbouring county. He said he got a basic grounding in the bakery and that jobs were arranged for him by the Brothers.

- 8.653** There were no more than three or four boys working in the bakery and this number was even further reduced in the 1960s. The bakery was run by an ex-pupil who would not have been in a position to offer any real training to the boys outside of the basic bread-making. Here again was a missed opportunity. Baking was a skill that could have ensured employment, but only those boys needed to serve the needs of the Institution worked in this area, and even they did not receive proper training.
- 8.654** The tailors did little more than make and repair the boys' clothing. One ex-pupil from the early 1960s said he was in the tailor shop and learned how to use a needle and thread, but he did not feel he learned tailoring to the extent that he could consider it as a career option. He said he was removed from tailoring as he was not considered good enough.
- 8.655** Visitation Reports from the 1940s and 1950s made it clear that trades were expected to pay their way or to make a profit for the School. In 1947, the Visitor was critical of the fact that the tailor and shoemaker did little else than meet the necessities of the School. He noted that there was very good work being done in the various departments. He noted that the bread that was produced by the baker was very good, and there was a steady trade carried on with surrounding districts by the smiths and cartwrights.
- 8.656** Other potentially valuable trades were carpentry and painting but, again, the needs of the institution determined the way in which trades were taught and the number of boys engaged in them.
- 8.657** Although Visitors commented positively about trades between 1960 and 1964, it was noted that, by the end of 1964, trades had all but ceased in the School, with the exception of tailoring.
- 8.658** As mentioned above, In 1962, the Interdepartmental Committee on the Prevention of Crime and Treatment of Offenders visited the School. The Working Group noted that the boys received some instruction in carpentry and tailoring from the tradesmen. However, it was noted that there were no qualified instructors in the School, nor was there any course to prepare the boys to sit for the Group Certificate of the Vocational Schools. It was highlighted that the main occupational work carried on by the boys was farming.

The farm

- 8.659** The farm was an essential part of life in Letterfrack. The Congregation stated:
- The land under the care of the Brothers comprised 837 acres, but most of this was poor land consisting of bog and mountain. Nevertheless on the available 70 acres of arable ground the Brothers, farm workers and boys worked the land to provide for the needs of the institution.
- 8.660** Until 1954, the farm was under the charge of one Brother, Br Aubin, who was consistently praised for his farming skills by Visitors to the school: 'a good religious Brother and a capable farmer, a very useful devoted Brother'. The farm was, however, very labour intensive, and large numbers of boys were used as workers to keep it going. In 1942, the Visitor remarked that the rough nature of the ground, that did not allow for the use of a plough, meant that most of the tillage had to be done by spade. It was a significant source of income to the Institution and it provided the basic food requirements of the entire establishment. Even with the large numbers of boys assigned to the farm, it was hard, gruelling work. Full-time workers were assigned to the farm from 14 years of age, but all the children were engaged on a part-time basis after school and during holidays

and weekends. Turf-cutting, sea-weed harvesting and saving the hay were some of the jobs undertaken by the younger children.

8.661 One complainant described how a field of hay was raked by hand by up to 50 boys who worked in a line the length of the field. He also described crushing the silage in the winter:

they would fill it up and it went right up to the top, but it had to keep getting crushed ... any day it was raining, they would put us all in there walking around like that, (indicating) dancing, jumping on it and all that, and then go around and around and they would get it down a certain amount of inches every day until eventually they couldn't get anymore into it'.

8.662 In 1944, the Visitor noted that Br Aubin had 40 of the bigger boys under his control at farm work. The Visitor criticised the fact that Br Aubin was frequently not with the boys when they were out working and they were left with a workman whose suitability for such a charge was very doubtful.

8.663 In 1950, the Visitor commented on the large number of boys (46) on the farm, noting the 'large number compared with the number in the establishment. As all the work is spade work, that number is required'.

8.664 The Interdepartmental Committee reported that the main occupational work carried on by the boys was farming. It stated that 'a fully qualified instructor should be available to give vocational training in woodwork and carpentry, particularly to the large number of inmates from town and city areas who [were] unlikely to seek farm work on discharge'.

8.665 Ex-residents who spoke to the Committee were critical of the work they were required to do on a daily basis in Letterfrack, and were dismissive of the idea that it could ever be described as 'training'.

8.666 One former resident present in the late 1960s, when asked whether he learned a trade in Letterfrack, said *'if you call dragging a bag of turf around a bog or going around stamping silage'*.

8.667 Another resident from the late 1960s said that he did not learn a trade, he spent his time either darning socks or working in the fields and bogs. He said his work on the farm was all labour, pulling turnips, planting, digging etc. He was never involved with the cows or the pigs or anything like that.

8.668 The farm made a healthy profit almost every year, which was paid into the school accounts. It is not possible to determine how the farm income or profits were calculated or whether the School received the full benefit of the income generated. It did benefit to a significant extent, however, and the money from the farm kept the School solvent for much of the 1940s and 1950s.

8.669 Letterfrack was an industrial school and its avowed purpose was to provide industrial training and, if it was incapable of doing that, its function should have been re-assessed.

8.670 The majority of children were assigned to the farm at some time. The conditions in which the children worked and the tasks they were expected to perform were far in excess of what could be described as 'helping out' on the farm and could not be described as training. Complainants spoke of being used as slave-labour on the farm.

Health

8.671 In their Opening Statement for Letterfrack the Christian Brothers stated that the most common health problems in the School were outbreaks of measles and the 'flu. There was a nurse

employed and she resided in the infirmary which was located on the hillside above the School. There was a large proportion of very young boys in Letterfrack until 1954, and they would have required greater medical care than the boys in senior schools such as Artane.

8.672 The presence of a nurse appears to have ensured a higher standard of care than that available in other institutions.

8.673 In their Opening Statement the Christian Brothers provided details of deaths that had occurred in the school from 1940 to 1970. This showed a total of 15 deaths of boys during the relevant period. A peak occurred in 1941/1942, when seven of these deaths were recorded. The cause of death was stated to be consumption (tuberculosis) in five of these cases, and tuberculosis and pneumonia in the other two.

Recreation

8.674 The annals for Letterfrack showed that there was a strong musical tradition in the School throughout the 1940s and 1950s, which appeared to decline from the mid-1960s. Plays, concerts and musicals were performed annually and were well attended by the local people. These performances were also used to raise funds for the School.

8.675 Team games did not appear to have been a significant feature of life in Letterfrack although, from the late 1950s, there were occasional references to boys entering handball and boxing competitions.

8.676 A film projector was installed in the school hall in 1948. From that year onwards, films were shown, although one Visitor expressed reservations at temporarily professed Brothers attending such performances:

Whatever about the desirability of providing such entertainment for the boys and the people of the district, I think that the young brothers of T[emporary] P[rofession] should not be allowed to attend.

8.677 Despite the injunction against interaction with seculars, the local people appeared to be quite an important part of the life of the School, and attended functions there regularly.

Aftercare

8.678 According to the Opening Statement from the Congregation, when the time came for the boys to be released, they were either sent to parents or relatives, or to employers in a variety of trades and occupations. The Congregation submit that the work secured was usually directly related to the range of trades taught in the Institution.

8.679 1,356 boys were admitted and discharged between 1940 and 1974: 869 were discharged to relatives, 3 to hospital and 38 absconded; 131 were transferred to other institutions; and the balance of 318 to employment. Almost one-third of those went as farm workers.

8.680 The Congregation submitted that the provision of aftercare was a continual source of concern to the Provincial and Resident Managers over the years but, despite the suggestions and solutions put forward, all foundered on the twin rocks of lack of funding and manpower.

8.681 In its Final Submission the Congregation contended that aftercare, like trades, was another matter which the complainants did not wish to focus on. They submitted that there was no evidence to support a finding that the Congregation routinely placed boys in unsuitable or inappropriate employment.

- 8.682 The Children Act, 1908 specified that children committed to an industrial school remained up to the age of 18 under the supervision of the managers of the School. Children who were returned to parents or relatives no longer remained the responsibility of the Resident Manager. In the case of Letterfrack, therefore, over a 34-year period, the numbers for whom aftercare was required were relatively small – they averaged out at between nine and 10 per year. While in Artane and Glin a Brother undertook the work of visiting former pupils on a regular basis, in Letterfrack the position appears to have been that the Superior assumed the responsibility for aftercare, as there was no particular member of staff assigned to this task. The system was that application was made to the School by tradesmen or farmers who, if deemed suitable, would be assigned a boy for employment. The School did not actively seek employment for the boys. This would explain why the vast majority of boys ended up as farm workers, houseboys, or hotel staff. This was confirmed by ex-staff members in their interviews with Mr Bernard Dunleavy, who identified the lack of a dedicated staff member to look after past pupils as a serious flaw in the system.
- 8.683 The Congregation acknowledged that ‘without the allocation of a Brother to look after this aspect of the Institution’s duties, Letterfrack could not have been as effective in this area as other schools were’.
- 8.684
- **The boys of Letterfrack were especially vulnerable because they had been uprooted from their backgrounds and had spent years in a remote, inhospitable part of Ireland. Many were then returned to a city environment and were left without any support to help them make the adjustment.**

Emotional abuse

Position of the Congregation

- 8.685 The Congregation accepted that, for much of its existence, the School failed to cater for the emotional development of the child:

They (the staff) were doing their best, thinking that this is the best, and in fact it says often there, they did the best they could under the circumstances but didn’t realise all the emotional needs that were there at the time and that they couldn’t fulfill them given the structure.

- 8.686 The Congregation submits that the emphasis of the School was on the physical care and well-being of the children. There was little understanding of the emotional impact of residential care on children, in particular the effect of separation from home and family. Staff did not receive childcare training. Indeed, the Congregation noted that, for much of the period under review, no such training was available. It was not until the late 1960s that the emotional needs of the children began to be understood and catered for. They accepted that the Cussen Report had highlighted the need for appropriate emotional care in the 1930s. However, they stated that this was impossible to achieve in Letterfrack. The high pupil-staff ratio and the necessity of maintaining a high level of discipline to ensure order meant that the individual needs of the children could not be catered for. However, they stressed that this state of affairs was due to a lack of resources and, therefore, was the fault of the State not the Congregation.

Physical location

- 8.687 The physical location of the School was not conducive to ensuring that the emotional needs of the children were met. In the 1940s and 1950s, travelling to the School was difficult and out of the financial reach of most of the parents whose children were committed to the school. It was understandable, therefore, that small children with little understanding of these difficulties could feel abandoned. One complainant summarised the feeling of isolation well:

The only contact we had was a letter and every letter sent home had to be a good letter. Every letter that was sent home you had to be having a great time, they were learning you how to swim, they were learning you how to play football, they were learning you how to play this. Everything had to be good before you got the letter sent out. If you sent a wrong letter, that you were after hurting yourself, they would tell you out straight you wouldn't be able to send another letter home for two months because you shouldn't have put that in the letter.

8.688 Br Francois, who was present in the late 1950s and early 1960s, described it as an isolating, frightening place with poor facilities for the boys.

8.689 Br Telfour said its location was bleak and isolated, and he felt he was transferred there because he had missed some of his early morning calls in another school.

8.690 Letterfrack was seen as a tough posting, according to Br Anatole:

... it would be a tough job, a tough station, something you would not particularly choose, on account of what I have said, that it is isolated.

8.691 Br Dax said that he suffered isolation and loneliness in Letterfrack, and he claimed that this loneliness was a factor which led to his abuse of the boys.

8.692 Br Iven said he felt isolated from the friends he had made in his training of the previous five years, and another said he found it a lonely, isolating place:

Then in many ways I suppose that just went with the job, in the sense I was isolated in a room at the end of the dormitory, away from the Community.

8.693 In his interview with the Christian Brothers that was dealt with above, Br Ruffe described his reaction on being told that he was being sent to Letterfrack:

Well now, when I went to Letterfrack and don't mind admitting it and when I was told I was going to Letterfrack I shed bitter tears because I had paid a passing visit there when I was on holidays some years previously and when we went into the school that day, the fact that it was so far away from every place it affected me more I'd say than it would affect a boy and the fact that when I go in there at all was an upset in itself but I soon got used to that, after all it was my vocation.

8.694 • **The remote location of Letterfrack was a problem from the first days of the Institution in the 1880s, and it continued to be a problem for the rest of its history. It was identified in the early 1950s by the Department of Education and District Justices, when they cited it as the primary reason against turning Letterfrack into a reformatory-type institution. The Congregation, on the other hand, saw the remoteness and distance as advantages in dealing with so-called 'delinquents', because it removed the boys from what they saw as corrupting influences. The importance of family contact was not considered.**

Parental contact and applications for early discharge

8.695 The parent or guardian of a child detained in an industrial school had the right to apply to the Minister for Education for the release of the child pursuant to Section 69(3) of the Children Act, 1908 which allowed the Minister to exercise his discretion to release a child or young person committed. Pursuant to the Children (Amendment) Act, 1957 the position with regard to children who were non-offenders or those committed for non-attendance at school was different, in that the release was mandatory if the Minister was satisfied that the circumstances which led to the committal had changed or ceased and the parents were able to support the child.

- 8.696** An examination of the records of the Department of Education reveals that, invariably, applications for early release were initiated by the parents, very often through the offices of a local public representative. There does not appear to have been a system whereby a child's case or sentence was automatically reviewed to establish if any of the criteria for an early release were present.⁶⁵
- 8.697** Once a letter from a parent or public representative was received, the Department wrote to the School and sought observations on the character and ability of the child, together with his proficiency in education and trade (if any). The local Gardaí/ISPCC were contacted, and their recommendation was sought as to the financial and other family circumstances, including an assessment of the suitability of the parent/guardian to have custody of the child.
- 8.698** There are no records concerning application for early release prior to the late 1950s in the Letterfrack discovery from the Department of Education.
- 8.699** A number of examples from the Departmental records illustrated the factors that were taken into consideration by the Department in deciding whether or not to release the child:

Keeping the family together

- 8.700** The mother of a boy committed to Letterfrack for three and a half years for housebreaking applied for his early release six months into his sentence, as the family had emigrated to the UK. The school was not in favour on the grounds that the boy was getting on well in school and trade. The Department sought a reference from the police in the UK, who were satisfied that the family were in a financial position to support the boy and had not come to the notice of the police. The Department official, in coming to his decision, noted that, although the family had failed to exercise parental control in the past and despite the view of the School:

the emigration of the family to England is an important factor in this case and, lest the boy should feel he had been abandoned, perhaps it would be better to release him from detention and such action is recommended for the Minister's consideration.

- 8.701** The boy was released.

The suitability of the parents

- 8.702** The mother of a boy sentenced to two years in Letterfrack made representations through her local TD to have her son allowed home for Christmas and also sought a remission of his sentence. The boy had served two months when the application was made. The Garda report stated that, although the financial circumstances were adequate and the father was of good character, the mother was deemed unsuitable as she frequented pubs late at night and two of her other children were in detention for criminal activity. The School reported that he was progressing well at school, had settled and they did not recommend his release 'at present'.

- 8.703** The application was refused.

Proximity of the School to home

- 8.704** The parents of a boy detained in Letterfrack from 1970 to 1974 approached a number of public representatives one month after his detention to request their son be transferred to a school nearer his home. The School was not in favour and stated he had settled down and it would disrupt his education to transfer him. The Manager offered to facilitate a visit by the parents by bringing the boy to Galway.

⁶⁵ Gateways Chapter 3 goes into this in detail.

- 8.705** One year later, the parents made further representations and the School was contacted to assess whether there was a change in circumstances. The Manager stated that he had no objection to a transfer to Ferryhouse if there was a vacancy there. The authorities in Ferryhouse were approached by the Department and they refused to take the transfer.
- 8.706** The boy was not allowed home that summer, as he had failed to return on two previous occasions and a Brother from Letterfrack had had to be sent to fetch him.
- 8.707** The parents persisted and, in late 1971, they again sought a transfer for the boy. The parents were informed that they could now avail of a free travel scheme to see their son more regularly. This, however, did not prove helpful, as the journey to Letterfrack could not be achieved in a single day.
- 8.708** In 1972, the parents again approached the Department who asked the School to allow him home on supervision. This was rejected by the School Manager who was 'certain the release of this boy would not be for his good'. A Garda report in mid-1972 stated that the family had a nice comfortable home and could afford to maintain and support their son, although it did not recommend his release due to the failure by the father to exercise control of his son in the past. The boy was allowed home for a month's holiday in 1972.
- 8.709** In 1973, the mother again wrote to the Minister, complaining about the length of time her son was incarcerated and his punishment for not returning to the School following his earlier holidays:
- ... I think it a bit much revenge to take on a child, after all Mr. Minister you will agree with me the way I feel about by poor child locked away for so long and others can hold up banks and kill all before them and get away with it.
- 8.710** She pleaded for his release and stated she was in a position to get him a job locally and wanted him home for Christmas.
- 8.711** Towards the end of 1973, the Resident Manager of the School stated that the boy was strong, sturdy and willing to work and was a most satisfactory pupil. He recommended that the boy be released to work with a responsible adult. The 1973 Garda report was not favourable, stating that the family home was overcrowded and in the opinion of the Garda 'the boy would be better off physically at Letterfrack, of course the psychological aspect is another matter. It is only natural for the mother to want all the family around her for Xmas'.
- 8.712** The boy was allowed home for Christmas but was not released until a further letter was sent in early 1974 by his mother to say she had a job waiting for him and wanted his release. The job offer checked out and the boy was finally released in March 1974, four months prior to his due date of discharge.

The age of the child, a first offence

- 8.713** In 1962, a 10-year-old boy was committed to Letterfrack until his 16th birthday for stealing a purse from a parked car. He gave the purse and its contents to his mother. She received a three-month suspended sentence. It was the child's first offence. Solicitors for the child and his father lodged an appeal against the severity of the sentence, and the boy was released pending the hearing of the appeal in mid-1962. The appeal was not successful and, in 1963, the boy's father wrote a number of letters to public representatives explaining why the appeal had failed. It appeared that, during the time when he was at home pending appeal, he was playing football with some friends and the ball went into a neighbour's garden, who reported the matter to the police and the boy was implicated in this incident. When the matter came before the court on appeal, the Garda Sergeant told the court that they had received a complaint but did not tell the Judge the nature of

the complaint. In his letter to Mr Haughey, the Minister for Education, the father explained why he wanted his son home:

I should think that after 6 years he will be a complete stranger in the family, as the rest of his brothers and sisters will probably have gone away from home to some employment, what chance has he of becoming acquainted with them ... I give you a guarantee he will never get into any kind of trouble again, as that 12 months has learned him a lesson, it would mean a lot to me if he were released, it is for his mothers sake I took the opportunity of writing to you, as she is constantly crying and talking about him, it grieves me so much to see her in such a state for the past 12 months.

8.714 The application was refused by the Department on the grounds that parental control in the family was poor, as manifested by the boy in question and by two other members of the family. It was felt that the mother had given a poor example in the past, and the boy's school attendance was only fair. He was making good progress with his studies in Letterfrack and it would not be in his best interests to release him.

8.715 The father wrote to the President of Ireland in September 1963, pleading with him to have his son released. He stated that the boy had developed psoriasis from worry and anxiety that had required hospitalisation. He stated that the boy was medically fit going to Letterfrack and 'as God forgave us all our transgressions why should there not be forgiveness for a child'. The letter was passed to the Department of Education by the Office of the President. The boy remained in Letterfrack.

8.716 Three years later, in 1966, his mother wrote to the Minister for Education, stating that her son had now served four and a half years of a six-year sentence and requested his release so that he could assist his father in his newly started timber business.

8.717 The School report recommended his release on a supervision certificate.

8.718 A Garda report was sought, which stated that the family were in poor circumstances and the father and mother were not suitable persons to be entrusted with the custody of their son. The Department official reviewing the case stated:

In the boy's favour it must be said that he was committed for his first offence, he was only 10 years of age at committal, has spent $4\frac{1}{2}$ years in the school and his conduct there has been satisfactory. He has completed the primary school programme. Even though his parents are not to be recommended I think it would be only fair to the boy to let him take his chance and release him.

8.719 A more senior official recommended to the Secretary of the Department that the mother be informed that, if she could get him a job other than working with his father, they would be prepared to discharge him, having stated that:

this boy has undoubtedly been detained too long for a single offence. In addition he is evidently of good intelligence and well conducted.

8.720 It took his mother another eight months to get him a suitable job and, following another letter of representation, he was released in December 1967, three months before his due date in 1968.

Change in family circumstances

8.721 A boy was sentenced to three years in Letterfrack in 1963. He was only five years old when his mother died, and he was taken to reside with his grandmother who was too old to care for him. As a result, he fell into bad company and was convicted of stealing from a local grocery shop. His father subsequently remarried and made representations to his local TD to secure his son's release, as he had a promise of a job for the boy aboard an Irish Flag Ship. The School reported

his conduct was good but he was frail and not suitable for a seafaring life. The Garda report was favourable, and the Department decided to release him, with the comment regarding his health that 'such a life might improve his health'.

- 8.722**
- It is clear from the Department of Education files that parents initiated the efforts to secure release of their children. Once this process started, there was a system in place whereby reports were sought by the Department from the School and the Gardaí. No particular weight was attached to any report, and the Department occasionally overrode the views of both the School and the Gardaí.
 - Children whose parents did not take steps to have them released do not appear to have been considered for discharge, as there is no evidence from the files that cases were reviewed by the Department other than in the manner outlined above.
 - The fundamental unfairness of incarcerating a child for six years or more was never addressed by the Department of Education or by the Congregation. Applications by parents were dealt with on a case-by-case basis, and those children whose parents did not take this initiative were left to serve out their full sentence without remission.
 - If this was a child-centred service, there would have been on-going assessment by the Resident Manager as to whether the child's best interests were being served by continuing in the school. No such assessment took place.

Climate of fear

8.723 The climate of fear has been described earlier in this chapter, in the context of punishment and bed-wetting, but it also had consequences for the emotional well-being of the children.

8.724 It was well illustrated by a number of the former residents. One resident present in the late 1950s and early 1960s said:

From the time you went into that you lived in fear, you were just constantly terrified. You lived in fear all the time in that school, you didn't know when you were going to get it, what Brother was going to give it to you, you just lived in fear in that school.

8.725 Another former resident described the sense of fear:

What happened was when I went down there first I was a nervous wreck, as any child would be. You are going down here and I have never experienced a regime like it that was going on in the place. It was awful, it was very very cold, it was very very lonely, but the worst thing about it all, it was so scary.

8.726 This sense of fear was often heightened by the manner in which punishment could be deferred by the Brothers. One resident present in the late 1960s described it as follows:

I think one of the worst things in a sense, in one way it would be as well if they were to give you a beating and get it over there and then, but you had the thing of various times, "I'll see you after" ... Sometimes they would leave this for days and you think they were after forgetting and then they would pounce on you.

8.727 Another complainant present in the late 1950s remembered one particular Brother who often deferred punishment:

Br Noreis was his own judge, jury and executioner. His favourite thing would be "I will see you later". Sometimes you were lucky and he meant shortly later and it was over and done with, sometimes you were unlucky and it could be a week later and during that week you walked around terrified you never knew when that – well, for want of a better word, when the hand was going to come down and grab you, then you were brought into the library ... we were in a home where the children there were put in for various reasons,

criminal or because they had no one to look after them. We got sent there to be educated and looked after, fed nourished, I won't say loved, but looked after; we got none of that.

- 8.728** Violence was a feature of life and was reflected in bullying. This ranged from schoolyard bullying to bullying at meal times and, at the extreme end of the spectrum, peer sexual abuse. One resident from the late 1960s described the bullying:

... you had to fight for survival because there was a lot of bullying and a lot of stuff going on. You had to be on your guard all the time because there was bigger kids and stronger kids, different kids and different types. Rough kids and bad kids; there was all different types.

Yes, it was dog eat dog. It was survival, you had to do everything to survive, you know. You had to fight, scratch, you had to do everything for survival. There was no love or affection or caring from anyone, you know. And there was no one to talk to, you just had to form your own way of survival.

- 8.729** Another resident from the early 1960s told the Investigation Committee:

when I got down to Letterfrack, needless to say, I was very very scared. Now I am not going to ... I am no angel, never have been, I was a scamp, if you like on the streets at the time, so my father always called it to me anyway, black sheep of the family, but I know in my heart and soul this is not about what I had done. It was the way I was treated in there and I was treated awful, I was starved, I was in rags. I felt I was bullied from the moment I went down until a couple of months, or a couple of weeks before I went out.

- 8.730** There was a lot of bullying over food. For many years the system of food allocation was that a number of boys would be seated at each table. Food would be delivered to the table, and the boys themselves would divide it up. This had the unfortunate consequence that younger, smaller or more inexperienced boys received less than other boys. One former resident from the early 1960s described his experiences in this regard as follows:

Well, you will always get a bully like, even to this day and age you will always have a bully in school. You will always have one boy that would be that bit more dominant over certain young fellows. You'd get a certain thing on your plate, a hard boiled egg might be on your plate or vice versa, that was a luxury to get a hard boiled egg and he would just take it off you, something like that.

- 8.731** Two Brothers, Brs Dondre and Karel, who were present in the early 1970s, told the Investigation Committee that there was a lot of bullying by bigger boys on the younger boys during their time in Letterfrack.

Other factors contributing to emotional abuse

- 8.732** The remoteness of the School, the high pupil-staff ratio, the failure of Managers and staff to care for the individual needs of the children, the high levels of discipline and punishment as well as the consequent atmosphere of fear meant that Letterfrack was for many children a very lonely place. Despite all the hustle and bustle, many boys lived in fear, both of staff and each other. This meant that they were reluctant to form close friendships out of fear of being seen as weak or giving another boy a hold over them. A recurring theme in the evidence was this lack of friendships. A number of individuals told how they carried this fear of forming personal attachments with them into adult life.

- 8.733** One former resident stated, *'I have no male friends in the world, I am frightened of them – what do they want off me?'*

8.734 As already stated, a number of Brothers were unhappy and isolated in Letterfrack. The burden of work fell on the shoulders of a few, and this had its own implications for how they treated the children. Some former residents described how some members of staff were kind to them at times but the mood could change in an instant. One former resident described this as follows:

When they took the humour, they would show you, what do you call it, an act of kindness and you got kind of swallowed by this in some ways and you thought – you could get the off day like Telfour or Curtis would show you some act of kindness and next of all they just turn. There was a lot of Jeckyl and Hyde with them.

8.735 Another former resident made a similar point:

Some of them they would like you one minute and you would be getting on, and the next minute, they would just bring you down. You put a curtain up in front of them.

8.736 Br Dondre described how younger boys could cling to him for protection. However, this natural yearning for love and attention was something that was taken advantage of by a number of sexual abusers. One such acknowledged abuser (Br Anatole) testified that he viewed his relationship with one of his victims as one of affection and closeness.

8.737 This Brother was not alone in using these tactics. One complainant who had been abused by Br Jean said that this Brother took advantage of his need for love and attention in order to buy his silence:

He was kind to me in that way, but it was sweets and a toy at the time I thought was kind to me but he must have been just softening me up for his own benefits. As I get older, I was innocent and I didn't know if everybody had toys or not. Some of the boys I suppose had more toys.

8.738 Another former resident told a similar story. He described how Br Curtis was nice to him and how he welcomed the attention. However, Br Curtis went on to sexually abuse him:

But Br Curtis, on many occasions, I didn't know at the beginning – and I welcomed a little bit of attention, because as I sort of outlined, you know, I had been taken away from home, and Br Curtis, I didn't realise that it was wrong, what he was doing.

- 8.739**
- **The boys lived in a hostile environment isolated from their families, and often faced bullying and sexual abuse by their peers. The Brothers, far from offering protection, added to the fear by being punitive figures who were remote and unapproachable. One Brother described little boys following him in the playground, because proximity to him provided the sole deterrent to bullies.**
 - **Brothers had to be both teachers and warders. Most Brothers had little respect for boys in their care, which was particularly evident in the way punishments were administered, and also in some of the more cruel punishments that were calculated to cause humiliation as well as pain.**
 - **The Congregation did not accept that there was an 'atmosphere of fear' within Letterfrack during the relevant period. It has, however, accepted that there were physical and sexual abusers present in the School for significant periods of the years under review. In addition, a number of individual respondent witnesses have accepted that they administered discipline in an excessive and capricious manner. It is impossible to deny the impact that cruel punishments would have had on bystanders. Into this mix may be put the prevalence of bullying and peer sexual abuse in the Institution. It is difficult to see how any conclusion could be reached other than that there was a climate of fear in the school.**

- **The School was run on the harshest of lines because it was deemed appropriate for the kind of children sent there, yet the Congregation concede that Letterfrack was particularly harsh in the 1940s when the children were mostly orphans, abandoned or neglected.**

General conclusions

8.740 *Physical abuse*

1. There was a climate of fear in Letterfrack. Corporal punishment was severe, excessive and pervasive. Violence was used to express power and status and was practically a means of communication between Brothers and boys and among the boys themselves. Punishment was inescapable and frequently capricious, unfair and inconsistent. Rules on corporal punishment were disregarded at all levels.
2. The Congregation did not carry out proper investigations of cases of physical abuse. It did not impose sanctions on Brothers who were guilty of brutal assaults.
3. Protection of the boys was not a priority for the Congregation in dealing with excessive and unlawful punishment, and the Department of Education abrogated responsibility by leaving supervision and control of this area entirely to local management.

Sexual abuse

4. A timeline of documented and admitted cases of sexual abuse shows that for approximately two-thirds of the period 1936-1974 there was at least one Brother in Letterfrack who sexually abused boys at some time and for almost one-third of the period there were at least two such Brothers there. One Brother worked for 14 years before being detected. Another who served for a separate period of similar length went undetected for many years after the school closed. It is impossible to calculate the true extent of sexual abuse in the institution but it is clear that more abuse happened than is recorded.
5. The Congregation did not properly investigate allegations of sexual abuse. Brothers who sexually abused boys and who were known to be a continuing danger were still permitted to work with children.
6. The manner in which Brothers who sexually abused were dealt with is indicative of a policy of protecting them, the Community and the Congregation, from the effects of disclosure of abuse. The needs of the victims were not considered.

Emotional/Neglect

7. The boys were unprotected in a hostile environment isolated from their families.
8. Remoteness was an acknowledged affliction that caused or exacerbated almost every difficulty that Letterfrack encountered from its inception.
9. Children left Letterfrack with little education and no adequate training.
10. Boys in Letterfrack needed extra tuition to bring them up to standard, but instead they got poor teachers and bad conditions.
11. The 1954 decision to restrict intake to children convicted of offences, taken in the face of opposition by both the Department of Education and District Justice McCarthy, was detrimental to the welfare of the boys in Letterfrack and was implemented in a way that was wholly inconsistent with the thinking behind it.