

Chapter 7

St Vincent's Industrial School, Goldenbridge ('Goldenbridge'), 1880–1983

Introduction

- 7.01** Goldenbridge was the subject of television and radio programmes and of a great deal of media coverage generally. Experiences of ex-residents of Goldenbridge featured in a number of publications, and some ex-residents were prominent in the campaign for redress. The programme 'Dear Daughter' was a dramatised documentary that featured this Institution, and Goldenbridge was also referred to in the television series 'States of Fear'. The screening of the third and last programme of that series provoked a huge public reaction and was followed by the Taoiseach's apology. Measures were announced that included the establishment of this Commission.
- 7.02** Public meetings that were intended to generate support for the campaign for recognition and redress provided occasions for former residents to come together and share experiences. The Sisters of Mercy expressed concern at the possibility that people were being influenced by what was said at these meetings.

The hearings

- 7.03** The Investigation Committee held both public and private hearings in respect of Goldenbridge. Sr Helena O'Donoghue, Provincial Leader of the South Central Province, gave evidence to the Committee in a public session on 15th March 2005. Her evidence was based on a detailed Opening Statement submitted in advance of the hearing.
- 7.04** Evidence was heard from witnesses in private hearings from 18th March until 28th April 2005. A total of 40 complainants gave evidence at this time. A further four former residents gave evidence, at the request of the Sisters of Mercy, to provide positive accounts of their experiences of growing up in Goldenbridge. All complainants who wished to give evidence did so; in addition, four respondents and two expert witnesses gave evidence.
- 7.05** The Committee had heard evidence from three complainants and two respondents in March 2002.
- 7.06** In the third stage of the inquiry into Goldenbridge (Phase III), a public hearing was convened on 15th May 2006 at the Herbert Park Hotel, Ballsbridge, and Sr Helena O'Donoghue once again gave evidence on behalf of the Congregation. This session focused on issues that arose as a result of the private hearings and the documentary material produced to the Committee.
- 7.07** Documentation was furnished as part of the discovery process from a number of sources, namely the Sisters of Mercy, the Department of Education and Science, An Garda Síochána, the Director of Public Prosecutions, the Archbishop of Dublin, and the medical records of some complainants.

7.08 The Sisters of Mercy furnished Submissions on 20th June 2005. These Submissions were made in the aftermath of the evidence heard at oral hearings and the documentary evidence which emerged during the course of the inquiry.

Establishment of Goldenbridge

The Sisters of Mercy were founded by Catherine McAuley in Dublin in 1831.

7.09 In 1855, Cardinal Cullen invited the Sisters of Mercy to provide a rehabilitation service to women who had been incarcerated in Mountjoy jail, by educating them and preparing them for final release. Cardinal Cullen originally rented the premises at Goldenbridge and paid the rent for a five-year period. The convict refuge was opened in 1856. The Sisters continued with this work until 1883.

7.10 In 1858, within two years of commencing this mission, the Sisters of Mercy had established a convent, a national school for the poor of the area, and a commercial laundry on the premises originally acquired by Cardinal Cullen, as well as the rehabilitation service for prisoners. These projects were funded by the mother house, which was then in Baggot Street, Dublin.

7.11 In 1880, a building within the complex was certified as an industrial school for girls, with a certification for 50. It was called St Vincent's Industrial School and it opened with an initial intake of 30 girls.

7.12 In 1883, the convict refuge was converted into the Industrial School. Dormitories, a dining hall, workrooms and extra accommodation were added over the subsequent two years, at a cost of some £2,000. Within five years, the School had increased its certification from 50 to 150.

7.13 From 1885, the number of children accommodated in the School remained steady, although there was a significant increase over the 1950s and 1960s, up to a high of 193 in 1964. At the time of its closure in 1983, there were 46 pupils in Goldenbridge.

Organisational structure

7.14 There were 10 Resident Managers in Goldenbridge Industrial School during the period under review (1936–1983). These Managers were appointed by the Superior General in Carysfort in Dublin. Goldenbridge convent, to which the Industrial School was attached, was a branch house of the Carysfort house, which was the mother house of all the Dublin Mercy Communities.

7.15 The Superior General of Carysfort appointed the Reverend Mother and assigned Sisters to Goldenbridge convent. From the records, it appears that the Reverend Mother also officially held the title of Resident Manager of the Industrial School. In reality, the Reverend Mother had very little involvement with the day-to-day running of the School. Her role consisted of interacting with the Department of Education. The actual management of the Industrial School was left to two nuns – the Sister-in-Charge and, from 1942 onwards, her assistant.

7.16 Only two of the 10 Resident Managers fulfilled the role of Sister-in-Charge and had direct involvement in the day-to-day management of the Industrial School. One such Resident Manager was Sr Bianca,¹ who held the position from the early 1940s to the mid-1950s. The other was Sr Venetia,² and her term of office ran from the early 1970s to the mid-1980s.

7.17 Two of the five nuns who were closely involved with the running of the Industrial School are alive today.

¹ This is a pseudonym.

² This is a pseudonym.

7.18 In the Congregation's Opening Statement, for Goldenbridge, it was stated:

The Sisters chosen for responsibility in Goldenbridge were women of ability, sound common sense and normal home background.

7.19 There appears to have been no formal structure of communication between Carysfort and Goldenbridge. According to the Opening Statement:

Reporting relationships were not very formal and probably depended very much on the personalities and expectations of the Superior in Carysfort and the local superior or resident manager in Goldenbridge.

7.20 There are no records of meetings or correspondence or any other documentation between the Resident Manager of Goldenbridge and the Superior General in Carysfort.

7.21 Sr Helena O'Donoghue stated that at one time Goldenbridge paid an annual levy to Carysfort and, at another period in time, all income went to Carysfort and an agreed budget was returned.

Goldenbridge management

7.22 The convent at Goldenbridge housed approximately 30 Sisters who were engaged in work throughout the local community. The Sisters ran a large national school in the Goldenbridge complex and also had a laundry that was a separate commercial enterprise. The laundry was closed in the mid-1950s, to facilitate the development of the secondary school. In addition, prior to 1954, there was what was known as a secondary top, which was an extension of the national school for children up to the age of 14.

7.23 The Industrial School in Goldenbridge was a large institution but very few Sisters worked in it. Prior to 1942, the Reverend Mother of the convent was always the Resident Manager of Goldenbridge. Although there were four different Resident Managers notified to the Department of Education between 1936 and 1942, these Sisters had very little contact with the daily administration in the School or with the children who were committed to it. The testimony of Sr Alida,³ who came to Goldenbridge as a young nun in the early 1940s, was that administration in the school and management were delegated to one nun, Sr Pietrina,⁴ who was elderly and diabetic when Sr Alida was appointed.

7.24 Sr Alida had no recollection of any other nun in the Community being involved in the running of the Institution other than Sr Pietrina. She said that, apart from visiting the Industrial School to watch films or concerts, there was no contact between the Industrial School and the convent, and the nuns in the convent would not have known the children in the Industrial School.

7.25 The day-to-day operation of the School and the care of the children were left to two lay teachers, Ms Dempsey⁵ and Ms Kearney.⁶ After classes, these teachers supervised the children and put them to bed. They were assisted by four care workers, one in the kitchen, one in the laundry and two generally in the house. In the evening, Sr Pietrina returned to the convent, and the two lay teachers looked after the children until the next day. There were 150 children in Goldenbridge at that time.

³ This is a pseudonym.

⁴ This is a pseudonym.

⁵ This is a pseudonym.

⁶ This is a pseudonym.

7.26 Before Sr Bianca was appointed to Goldenbridge, Sr Vincenza⁷ of Carysfort had appointed Sr Divina⁸ as Resident Manager in the early 1940s, which prompted the Assistant Secretary of the Department of Education to protest. He wrote:

I am desired by the Minister for Education to call your attention to the fact that the new Resident Manager whom you have appointed in St. Vincent's Industrial School, Goldenbridge, is 79 years of age. The Minister feels that the management of an Industrial School would constitute a very heavy burden and responsibility on a lady of this advanced age. The supervision of the feeding, clothing, education and health of about 150 children, together with the keeping of the many accounts, records etc., which are required and, in addition, the fulfilment of her duties as Reverend Mother of the community would, in the Minister's opinion, constitute a heavy burden on a much younger and more active person.

The Minister would accordingly be glad if you would reconsider this appointment with a view to appointing a much younger Sister who has had experience of children and on whom the complex duties of management would not be so burdensome.

7.27 Sr Vincenza replied immediately to the Assistant Secretary:

In reply to your letter of 29th September regarding the appointment of an aged Sister as Manager of Golden Bridge Industrial School, I have this day appointed as Manager one of the Staff – Sr. Bianca– to that position.

When appointing the Manager on the 12th September I sent an extra Sister to the Ind. School, who holds very high qualifications and certificates for Domestic Economy, Cookery, Needlework and Household Knowledge, to help with the management with the household work and management of the children, so that Sr. Bianca could be free to devote some time to the duties that the Manager would have to undertake.

The appointment made today leaves Mother Pia⁹ free to devote herself to the Community in Golden Bridge Convent.

7.28 That, however, was not the end of the matter; the Department immediately replied, seeking clarification:

Please state whether it is your intention to authorise Sister Bianca to exercise all the powers, functions and duties of the Managers in accordance with the provisions of the Children Acts, 1908 to 1941.

7.29 The Department of Education wanted to ensure that the actual day-to-day running of the Institution would be in the hands of a young, energetic, qualified Sister. Sr Bianca was appointed as Sister-in-Charge of the Industrial School in the early 1940s, and was appointed Resident Manager the following year. At the same time Sr Alida, who was a young newly professed Sister, in her mid-20s, was appointed as her assistant. Sr Bianca continued as Resident Manager until the mid-1950s.

7.30 According to Sr Alida, when Sr Bianca took over '*she was a very powerful personality, controlling person. She went to her major Superior in Carysfort and said she would take the running of the school ... provided she got the handling of the finance*'.

7.31 Sr Alida said that this gave her '*great ease of conscience*' because it meant that nobody could ever question that the money given to the Industrial School was spent by the convent in any other way. She explained:

⁷ This is a pseudonym.

⁸ This is a pseudonym.

⁹ This is a pseudonym.

there were lots of allegations at that time made, rightly or wrongly, that school money went to the convent. That was the system. Sr Bianca ended that system and the money was – she had the cheque book, Pietrina never had a cheque book, and paid the bills.

7.32 Sr Alida maintained that only a person as powerful as Sr Bianca could have succeeded in having this change made to the management structure of Goldenbridge. She said that, before Sr Bianca's intervention, the money came into the convent to the Superior and was lodged to the bank:

I know we used to say that it wasn't all totally honestly done, I have absolutely nothing to say about that. I am not saying that. What I am saying was that the person running the school, Sr. Pietrina, would have said to me one day, and she was a long time in the school, "all the money I ever handled while I was in the School was the money for the dripping".

7.33 Sr Alida described Sr Bianca as a woman with a forceful personality:

I am saying it now with gratitude in my heart to her, she was a very controlling person, she could achieve things that I would never have done. I would have started in Goldenbridge if I were in her shoes doing a very different thing. I would have started looking for money to buy knickers and vests for the children. She saw the bigger facilities. They matched her personality. She got the walk-in fridge, she got two big steamers, the hotels wouldn't have them at that time, the kind she got.

She had massive immediate improvements in the School, massive. She didn't see the need for changing the blankets or changing their homemade knickers. The School wouldn't have advanced as much as they did only for the power she had.

7.34 Sr Alida spoke at length about the changes that Sr Bianca introduced into Goldenbridge Industrial School immediately upon her appointment. In many ways, these changes speak more of the regime that existed before Sr Bianca's appointment than anything else. They point to a management which had been so poor and so negligent that the children could not possibly have received even a minimum standard of care.

7.35 The two areas which Sr Bianca tackled immediately were (i) the medical care of the children, and (ii) the standard of education.

7.36 The issue of the medical care in Goldenbridge is dealt with later. As will be shown, the condition of the children was so bad that the School had to be closed down for two weeks whilst the problems of scabies and ringworm were tackled. Bedding had to be removed and disinfected by Dublin Corporation, and all the children's clothing had to be boil-washed.

7.37 Sr Alida vividly described the problem tackled by Sr Bianca which had reached crisis proportions at the time of her appointment. The Institution had been allowed to deteriorate into an appalling condition and Sr Bianca tackled these problems energetically.

7.38 Similarly, the provision of education was extraordinarily poor at that time. Sr Bianca had to get basic equipment for the schoolroom. There were only two untrained lay teachers, and they were there in the dual capacity of carers and teachers. Sr Alida said:

... I never asked and I have no idea how they taught the 150 children of a school going age or how schooling was managed, but there was a programme for industrial school girls over 13 years of age. Everyday, five days a week, they had domestic training, cooking, laundry and dressmaking after 12.30, after the lunch hour.

7.39 Sr Alida described a lack of any facilities in the classroom. Only two of the four classrooms in Goldenbridge appeared to be in use. This led her to believe that no other Sister from the convent

was actively engaged in teaching in Goldenbridge in the years prior to her arrival with Sr Bianca. She confirmed that Sr Pietrina did not teach.

- 7.40** For the first few weeks of her time in Goldenbridge, the efforts of both Sr Alida and Sr Bianca were concentrated on the children's health and dealing with the medical conditions that they found there. Once these medical problems had been brought under control, schooling was resumed.
- 7.41** Sr Bianca ordered playground equipment from England at this time, including a number of swings and a merry-go-round and a drinking fountain for the playground.
- 7.42** Sr Alida went on to describe the extremely primitive conditions in the Industrial School generally. It appeared that the only washing machines were so old and ineffective that they were not used, and all the washing for the 150 children was done by hand. She said the machines were eventually re-serviced and brought into use, but that they were always ineffective and it took a long time to wash the clothes.
- 7.43** The cooking facilities in the kitchen were also primitive, and Sr Bianca acquired two large steamers that she used to prepare vast quantities of food. Conditions were difficult on other levels: it was very difficult to heat the Institution, and very difficult to get basic provisions for the children; all the clothing was handmade on the premises by the older children under the supervision of a lay worker.
- 7.44** Sr Alida said that the older girls did all the domestic chores in the house.
- 7.45** When Sr Bianca left Goldenbridge in June 1954, Sr Laurella¹⁰ took over as Resident Manager, although Sr Alida, who arrived in Goldenbridge on the same day as Sr Bianca, was the effective Manager of the Industrial School from 1954 until she left in 1963.
- 7.46** The first former resident who gave evidence had been in Goldenbridge from 1949, and the Committee has relied on oral testimony to establish conditions after that time. Very little documentary evidence is in existence for conditions in the 1930s and 1940s.
- 7.47** The Department of Education Medical Inspector, Dr Anna McCabe, inspected the premises and from time to time made suggestions regarding the care of the children. Her first two inspections were significant, because they coincided with the appalling conditions described by Sr Alida. The first was in 1939 and the second was in 1941. Nothing in these reports would indicate the level of neglect encountered by Sr Alida.
- 7.48** At some time in the early 1950s or even the late 1940s, Sr Alida was approached by a businessman who suggested that the Institution could become involved in making rosary beads. Thus, the bead-making industry in Goldenbridge was introduced into the daily routine of the pupils, and it continued until the mid-1960s.
- 7.49** In the early 1950s, Sr Bianca made the decision to acquire a holiday home for Goldenbridge in Rathdrum, County Wicklow. In 1954, a large house was bought for £3,000. According to Sr Alida, the money earned from the bead-making contributed £1,000 of this purchase price. According to the Opening Statement:
- ... it enabled everyone to have a summer holiday away from the institution. All children would spend some time in the summer at the holiday house and those who could not go home for a holiday spent the entire summer holidays there.

¹⁰ This is a pseudonym.

Although some former residents did not enjoy going to Rathdrum during the holidays, for most of them it represented a welcome respite from school and, in particular, from bead-making.

- 7.50** Ms Kearney, a teacher in the Institution, gave evidence that, prior to the purchase of the house in Rathdrum, children went on holidays to other Sisters of Mercy homes that were in the countryside or beside the sea. To spend £3,000 on a house that was only used for a few weeks every year, at a time when food and clothing and basic educational equipment were lacking, does not appear to be the most appropriate allocation of scarce resources.
- 7.51** In 1954, when Sr Alida took over the management of the Industrial School, Sr Venetia joined her as a full-time assistant. She was a qualified primary teacher. Ms Dempsey and Ms Kearney were still the two lay teachers in Goldenbridge at that time, and there was also a small number of other lay staff employed by the Institution. In addition to the lay staff and the two Sisters, the running of Goldenbridge was also entrusted to the care of what were known as 'care workers'. These care workers were girls who had grown up in Goldenbridge and were unable to get work outside the Institution.
- 7.52** The template for the day-to-day running of the Institution had been established by Sr Bianca. Sr Alida said that she continued the methods and systems introduced by Sr Bianca although she did, as might be expected, make some improvements along the way.
- 7.53** Sr Alida left Goldenbridge in 1963. She told the Inquiry about the circumstances of her departure. She had asked her Superior in Carysfort if she could be relieved from teaching duties, so as to be able to devote herself entirely to the administrative and caring side of her work. The response from Carysfort was to remove her entirely from Goldenbridge. Sr Alida was clearly unhappy at the manner of her removal, and she was in no doubt that it was because she had complained of overwork to her Superiors.
- 7.54** Sr Alida was succeeded by Sr Simona¹¹ for a short period, after which, in mid-1963, the management of Goldenbridge was taken over by Sr Venetia. Sr Venetia was responsible for many of the positive changes that occurred in the School throughout the 1970s. She was the person who steered through the change from institutional care to the group home arrangements that were introduced in the 1980s, and she ultimately oversaw the closure of Goldenbridge.

Numbers

- 7.55** The Department of Education reports revealed that the numbers of children detained in industrial schools increased until 1930, after which there began a steady decline. This decline was not experienced in Goldenbridge: in contrast, the numbers there continued to increase and, in 1962, the Resident Manager reported to the Department of Education that the School housed 193 pupils. According to Department of Education reports, there were 46 children in the Institution on its closure in 1983.
- 7.56** In 1938, the accommodation and certified limits stood at 130 children. In February 1938, the Resident Manager applied to increase the accommodation limit to 150. An increase to 140 children was granted by the Department of Education on foot of this application.
- 7.57** A further increase in the accommodation limit was granted in 1941, which brought the figure up to 150 children, but the certification limit remained the same at 130.

¹¹ This is a pseudonym.

7.58 On 7th May 1943, the Resident Manager wrote to the Department, seeking an increase in the accommodation limit from 150 to 160 children, which was acceded to. However, on 22nd July 1943, Dr Anna McCabe wrote to the Department Inspector, following a visit to the School, expressing her disapproval of this increase. She stated that the School was 'absolutely crammed to capacity' and that the infirmary had been converted into a dormitory without any alternative put in place. Accordingly, on 14th August the Department wrote to the Resident Manager and stated that the accommodation limit would revert to 150 children. The certified limit was changed to 140 on 1st April 1943.

7.59 Another application was made on 19th October 1951 to the Department, by Sr Bianca, to increase the accommodation limit from 150 to 160 children. In support of this application, she stated that various improvements and additions had been made to the premises, including the acquisition of another house. The Department requested Dr McCabe to inspect the School with a view to making a recommendation in this regard. She carried out an inspection and recommended that, in view of the improvements made, an increase in the accommodation limit to 160 children could be sanctioned. The application was formally acceded to and took effect from 9th November 1951.

7.60 In December 1954, the Resident Manager applied for and obtained certification for the admission of 15 infant boys. This was done at the request of the Archbishop of Dublin, Dr McQuaid, in order to provide relief to mothers who needed hospital care and who required care for their children on a temporary basis. According to the Resident Manager, it would allow siblings to be kept together. The Department accordingly increased the accommodation limit to 165 children.

7.61 On 17th May 1962, the Resident Manager made another application to the Department for an increase in the accommodation limit, to 200 children. In support of her application, she stated that a new 220ft wing had been built, with a capacity to sleep up to 60 children. She accepted that the accommodation limit of 165 had been exceeded in the past year or more, and that they had at that time 193 children. The Department carried out an inspection of the premises and agreed to an increase in the accommodation limit to 185 children on 27th April 1963.

Conclusions

- 7.62**
- **Sr Alida and a lay teacher depicted Goldenbridge as a grim institution in the 1940s, when children were seriously neglected and when inadequate staffing deprived them of proper care.**
 - **150 children were left in the care of two unqualified teachers and an ill, elderly Sister. The person with statutory responsibility, the Resident Manager, took no active part in running the Institution.**
 - **Defects in the management of the School were not observed by official inspectors.**

Emergence of allegations of abuse in Goldenbridge

7.63 The allegations of abuse in Goldenbridge first entered the public domain with the broadcast by RTE Radio 1 of an interview with an ex-resident, Ms Christine Buckley, on the Gay Byrne morning radio show. This was broadcast on 8th November 1992.

7.64 It was the quest for her parents, and in particular for her father, which she undertook in her 30s, that brought Christine Buckley to the Gay Byrne show, but during the interview she was asked about her experience of growing up in Goldenbridge in Dublin. She described abuses that she and others suffered while resident there. Immediately, phone calls came in to RTE from women and men who had had similar experiences and who wished to extend their good wishes and sympathy to her. Meetings were set up with ex-residents, and the story was picked up by most of the national media.

- 7.65** Stories about institutional abuse, and in particular about Goldenbridge Industrial School, continued to appear sporadically in newspapers for the following couple of years, but it was not until 1996, when the ‘Dear Daughter’ programme was broadcast, that Goldenbridge was once again the subject of intense media coverage and speculation.
- 7.66** Shortly after the airing of ‘Dear Daughter’, Sr Alida was interviewed on the current affairs programme, Prime Time. In the course of that interview, she admitted that she had been harsh at times, but denied that children were abused in the horrific way described in many of the headlines. According to Sr Helena O’Donoghue, ‘This denial would appear to have been almost completely ignored in the public domain and it would appear that judgment had been given’.
- 7.67** Shortly before the ‘Dear Daughter’ programme was broadcast on RTE, the Sisters of Mercy commissioned a professional childcare expert to write a report to assess the allegations which were being made by former residents in Goldenbridge. The Crowley Report offered little comfort to the Sisters who had commissioned it.
- 7.68** Mr Crowley interviewed both Sr Alida and Sr Venetia. In his report he stated:
- Sr. Venetia confirmed that the general atmosphere was excessively and consistently cruel even relative to standards of the time. She confirmed that fear of and actual physical beatings and verbal abuse was a matter of routine and that the general account of children, for example, waiting on the landings was accurate. Wetting was defined as a crime and, therefore, punishable through humiliation and physical beatings. Sr. Venetia confirmed the allegations in relation to the tumble dryer and drinking from the toilet cistern. She also confirmed the bead making and that failure to obey rules were normally punishable by physical beatings.
- 7.69** He said of Sr Alida:
- She was trained by Sr Bianca, whom she describes as a very large powerful woman with a harsh aggressive and unpredictable personality.
- On reflection Sr Alida perceives the policies and practices of the 50s and 60s as being based on ignorance and failing to understand or care appropriately for the children.
- 7.70** In conclusion, Mr Crowley stated:
- The unsafe world of Goldenbridge developed a very particular culture which could not meet the needs of children. Very powerless people had enormous and immediate power over troubled and troublesome children. The abuse of the power and powerlessness was almost inevitable.
- Almost any kind of abusive incidents could have occurred.
- ‘Dear Daughter’ programme**
- 7.71** The ‘Dear Daughter’ programme contained a number of very serious allegations against Goldenbridge and the Sisters of Mercy, and most of these are dealt with in the sections following on physical and emotional abuse.
- 7.72** After the ‘Dear Daughter’ programme was broadcast, newspaper coverage of the allegations was intensive and almost exclusively condemnatory of the Sisters of Mercy and Sr Alida. Headlines such as ‘Unmerciful Nun’s Tale’, ‘Hell on Earth for the Sin of Being Born’, and ‘Nightmarish Abuse by Sisters of Mercy’ appeared in newspapers. Former residents gave interviews on local and national radio, and allegations were recounted without any effective challenge.

- 7.73** Following the broadcast of the ‘Dear Daughter’ programme, a Garda investigation was undertaken, to establish whether criminal charges could be brought. There were no prosecutions, but the Garda files have been made available to this Inquiry.
- 7.74** On 1st July 2004, Sr Breege O’Neill, Leader of the Congregation, gave evidence to the Investigation Committee held in public on behalf of the Sisters of Mercy dealing with the emergence of allegations of child abuse in the Sisters of Mercy institutions. She spoke of the great hurt felt by the Community at the allegations that were being made, and also spoke of the enormous sacrifice made by Sisters throughout the years in aiding the poor and needy in this country. She asked that a proper and balanced investigation should take place into this whole matter.
- 7.75** On 15th March 2005, Sr Helena O’Donoghue made an Opening Statement at the public Phase I hearing in relation to Goldenbridge. Whilst she admitted that there was undoubtedly a regime that, by today’s standards, would be described as harsh and severe, the Sisters were not satisfied that it was an abusive regime or that children were wilfully neglected whilst in their care.
- 7.76** The Sisters of Mercy would not accept that the regime was cruel, abusive or neglectful. Whilst they admit that corporal punishment was the accepted means of imposing discipline, they say it was not done in an excessively harsh or extreme manner. They say that the extraordinary dedication and sacrifice of the Sisters, in caring for the poorest and most needy children in Dublin, must be taken into account when assessing the value of the work done in Goldenbridge. In particular, the Congregation does not accept the statements of Sr Venetia or Sr Alida, as quoted by Mr Crowley, as being accurate or fair.
- 7.77** The complainants, on the other hand, state that the regime that they were subjected to was cruel, abusive and neglectful. They say that it left them ill-equipped to deal with life when they left the Institution, and that the damage inflicted on them, either neglectfully or deliberately, has scarred them in every aspect of their lives. Complainants acknowledged the physical provision made for them by the Sisters of Mercy, but it is their evidence that the abuse, degradation and neglect that they suffered far outweighed whatever benefits they might have received by virtue of having been resident in Goldenbridge.

Physical abuse

Corporal punishment

- 7.78** Most complaints about physical abuse related to the administration of corporal punishment: there were allegations that it was excessive, pervasive, often undeserved, and even capricious, with the result that, in Goldenbridge, corporal punishment became the norm, and the children lived in a climate of fear. The Sisters of Mercy deny these allegations and, while they accept corporal punishment was used, submit that its use was normal by the standards of the day.
- 7.79** The Rules and Regulations for the Certified Industrial Schools in Ireland imposed limits on the use of corporal punishment. These limits were very restrictive for girls under 15 years, and even more so for older girls. The issue of discipline was dealt with in Regulation 12:

DISCIPLINE: The Manager or his Deputy shall be authorised to punish the Children detained in the School in case of misconduct. All serious misconduct, and the Punishments inflicted for it, shall be entered in a book to be kept for that purpose, which shall be laid before the Inspector when he visits. The Manager must, however, remember that the more closely the School is modelled on a principle of judicious family government the more salutary will be its discipline, and the fewer occasions will arise for resort to punishment.

- 7.80** Regulation 13 stated that the punishments should consist of:
- (a) Forfeiture of rewards and privileges, or degradation from rank, previously attained by good conduct.
 - (b) Moderate childish punishment with the hand.
 - (c) Chastisement with the cane, strap, or birch.

7.81 The Regulation continued:

Referring to (c), personal chastisement may be inflicted by the Manager, or, in his presence, by an Officer specially authorised by him, and in no case may it be inflicted upon girls over 15 years of age. In the case of girls under 15, it shall not be inflicted except in cases of urgent necessity, each of which must be at once fully reported to the Inspector. Caning on the hand is forbidden.

No punishment not mentioned above shall be inflicted.

7.82 In addition, the Department of Education issued circulars and guidelines to Industrial School Managers, indicating that corporal punishment must always be kept within the bounds set down by the Regulations and must never be used excessively. Circular 11/1946 stated:

Corporal punishment should be resorted to only where other forms of punishment have been found unsuccessful as a means of correction. It should be administered only for grave transgressions, and in no circumstances for mere failure at school lessons or industrial training.

7.83 The Circular went on to state that punishment should be confined to slapping on the hand with a light cane or strap, and that this should only be administered by the Resident Manager or by a member of staff specifically authorised by him. It added that 'any form of corporal punishment not in accordance with the terms of this circular is strictly prohibited'.

7.84 The Sisters of Mercy say that the general prevalence of corporal punishment in schools during this period is a factor which should be taken into account when determining whether corporal punishment was excessive or abusive. The regulations quoted above were drawn up at a time when corporal punishment was even more prevalent and yet the authorities recognised the need to make rules to protect children in care.

Punishment book

7.85 The regulations required that a punishment book be maintained and 'laid before the inspector when he visits.'

7.86 The Investigation Committee has seen no evidence of any punishment book in Goldenbridge. There is no reference to it in any of the documentation furnished to the Investigation Committee, nor is any reference made to it by the Department of Education inspector who visited Goldenbridge on regular occasions.

Allegations of physical punishment heard by the Investigation Committee

7.87 The evidence heard by the Investigation Committee broadly grouped the complaints about physical punishment under three headings. They were:

- Formal beatings, where the children who had been singled out for punishment were lined up and beaten with a stick. This usually took place late at night, on a landing outside the nuns' rooms or cells.
- Beatings given for specific 'offences' such as bed-wetting, or failure to work fast enough at making rosary beads. These also were usually administered on the landing.

- Informal beatings, where lay staff and nuns administered corporal punishment on the spot for trivial reasons or even for no reason.

The formal beatings: the implement used

7.88 The formal beatings were administered with an implement that Sr Alida called ‘a *slapper*’ and the girls called a stick. Several witnesses gave a description of it. One witness, who was in Goldenbridge in the 1950s and early 1960s, told the Committee that it was a stick that a carpenter had made for Sr Alida. She described it as a flat stick, rounded off at the end, and varnished.

7.89 Another complainant described the stick used by Sr Alida in some detail:

The stick, in my opinion, was about a foot and a half long, about that length (indicating), it had rounding sort of ends, it was about an inch and a half thick and the width of it was about two inches. It was dark brown in colour ... It often reminds me of what I perceived to see as a hurl now with rounding ends but a bit thicker.

7.90 Sr Alida also gave a detailed description of it:

I used a slapper. I have never used a cane, there was never a cane used in the School in my time, neither was there a leather strap. The slapper I had, there was only one in the house and I don't think anybody else used it except myself, it was made of polished wood and it was about 15 inches long. It was rolled at the end and was about half an inch thick in the middle, maybe less. I calculated that it never marked or cut anybody but I would agree that it hurt because I got it on the knuckles myself, when if a child pulled her hand away it came down on my hands; so I know what it was like. I wish I'd never had to use it or I wish I was never in that situation with any child, but that's the situation I was in.

7.91 She added that she never saw anybody else use her slapper except for Sr Venetia. She said, ‘Lay people could give a clout with their hand but that would be the most that I would see them doing’. She said that no lay person ever beat the children, as far as she knew, but left it for her to do.

7.92 Sr Alida was inconsistent in her recollection of beating children on the landing. Initially, she recalled children being left on the landing for punishment, although not in relation to bed-wetting or bead-making. Later, when questioned by counsel for some complainants, she said that this was more a feature of Sr Bianca’s time, and that she had no real memory of that being a feature of her time there. She said that, although she could remember chastising a child on the landing, it was not on a regular basis.

The formal beatings on the landing

7.93 Many complainants spoke of the ordeal of being sent to the landing outside the nuns’ rooms for punishment. The system was initiated by Sr Bianca, and was also a feature of life during Sr Alida’s time. Children who had done something that the staff deemed to be wrong were told they were to be punished that evening. They had to line up on the landing at bedtime, after they had changed into their nightclothes, and wait to be beaten. The landing was cold and dark. A witness described the location:

... where we used to have to wait was off Sacred Heart dormitory and there was steps down and there was a big gap and there was a statue. The nuns used to sleep in kind of an alcove off the landing and the nun would come up and hit us, hit me.

7.94 Many complainants told the Committee how they stood sometimes for hours in the cold with bare feet. They were not permitted to sit down. Some of them described this waiting as worse than the beating itself.

7.95 One complainant in Goldenbridge from 1950s to the early 1960s said that, after Sr Alida became Resident Manager:

... she took over and you were put on the landing when you wet the bed or when you did anything else bold, but mainly for wetting the bed. I was all the time one of those people. She would leave you on the landing until she was ready to come up and smack you, and you could be there for a long time.

7.96 She explained:

To me, I think we waited two or three hours sometimes. We were just there, it really got late and we were falling asleep, and pushing one another when we heard her coming. You heard her coming eventually, but it wasn't only an hour or a half an hour, she would never come too soon it was always like you were there for ever, it seemed like forever ... it wasn't in her office, we were hit on the landing, smacked on the landing ... just her stick, the one she had everywhere with her. She just used to just bash you, just literally turn you around and wallop you. Sometimes she would hold out your hand, it depended.

7.97 Another complainant from the 1950s recalled being punished on the landing quite a few times, although she did not know why she was there. She said Sr Alida would sometimes smack them on the landing, but sometimes forget about them and leave them standing there for a very long time. She said she was frightened of the landing.

7.98 When cross-examined on the issue, she insisted that she was, on occasion, left all night on the landing. She said that Sr Alida would find her when she got up early the next morning and then sent her to bed, but that would be at about 6.00am.

7.99 Another witness from the 1950s told a similar story of waiting for hours for Sr Alida to come to bed. It was cold and dark, and they were not permitted to sit down. When she came up, she would not question them on what they had done wrong. She would proceed to punish with a stick, which she kept on a ledge on the landing. She would hit them on the hands and buttocks, usually 10 to 12 times. Sometimes, she used her hand rather than the stick. If it was very late when she came up to bed, she would tell them she would see them in the morning. The next day, she would beat them in front of her class. Waiting on the landing in anticipation of the punishment was, according to this complainant, worse than the actual beatings.

7.100 A complainant from the 1950s and early 1960s said that she was very frequently sent to wait on the landing. She said that she could not recall specific reasons. She added:

They seemed to be very very menial things, like maybe you stole a slice of bread or you ate out of the rabbit's cage or you drank water out of the toilet ... There wouldn't have been anything, except my dress tore one time and that was another thing that I remembered.

7.101 There could be up to six or seven girls waiting on the landing when she was there, and she said that the bigger girls would push the smaller ones in front of them. She could not explain why:

Why would anyone push someone in front, we knew we were going to be beaten anyway. Who wants to be beaten first? We would do that. Then she would, in rotation, she would beat us all.

7.102 When asked what she disliked most about waiting on the landing, she replied it was the fear and the cold. She said that they knew when Sr Alida was coming because they would hear a knock on a hatch at the bottom of the stairs, and someone opening it to give her water for her hot water bottle:

We would hear her. As soon as we heard the knock on the hatch we knew that was her that was coming. We would all jump up and push the smaller ones in front of us.

7.103 She described how they tried to cope with the cold while waiting:

We would be down on our hunkers trying to keep ourselves warm with our nightdress and try to rub our hands together so that they would get warm so that the slaps wouldn't – for some reason we thought the slaps wouldn't hurt if our hands were warm.

7.104 A witness from the 1950s and 1960s used to wet the bed, and so was sent to the landing from a very early age. She said:

When you wet the bed you had to wait on the landing. I don't know how many times I waited on the landing, I don't know whether it was every night or once a week or twice a week. You were hit for wetting the bed. I was a very young child, it might have been 10 minutes, to me it seemed like hours. I don't know the length of time I waited on the landing. You did get hit and you used to have to protect yourself.

7.105 She continued:

I was scared. You had to stand still, it was a very boring place to be. I just can't – I think the older ones – I probably did the same when I got older, the older ones pushed us to the front so the person that was hitting us her anger would be gone by the time she got to the bigger people ... I remember being shoved up to the top to get hit.

7.106 This explanation for pushing the younger children to the front, so that it was they who took the hardest hits, was put forward by another witness from the 1960s. She described the line of girls on the landing:

You would be weak, terrified, anxious, shivering and shaking, and trying not to lean against the wall ... because you would be afraid, you weren't supposed to do that, you weren't supposed to rest, it was punishment. You wouldn't sit down. You wouldn't risk falling asleep. There you stood.

7.107 She continued:

When you knew for sure she was arriving, there would be pushing and shoving about who was going first. Honest to God this is terrible, there would be younger children than you and you would be pushing them to get them to take the beating first. You didn't want to be the one to get the first of the strength. I am sorry, it was horrible, you had to do what you had to do. The screaming of children, the screaming of children will stay with me for the rest of my life about Goldenbridge. I still hear it, I still haven't recovered from that. Children crying and screaming, it was just endless, it never never stopped for years in that place.

7.108 Girls were affected by what was happening to others:

Whatever way they were going to be treated was no concern of mine but it did personally affect me ... I watched [a girl] sit on that landing on many occasions waiting for her beatings and I heard her screams and her shouting.

7.109 One witness, from the 1960s, described the distress she felt at seeing others being beaten:

The fact that I had to witness all those beatings, I had to stand there, they would be in my group, for example, and they were beaten. I would see them being slapped. There was a cross on the wall with INRI on the wall above the crucifix. I don't know how I learned to do this, but I would look at INRI and make up words, so that I wasn't there, so that I didn't soak up what was going on ... We were helpless people and the helpless ones were the ones that were not bright. I met one or two of them in the survivors' meetings in London and I stopped going to the survivors' meetings because it was too traumatic for me.

7.110 The anguish of those to be punished was increased by long periods of anticipation and by witnessing other girls' suffering. The landing became associated with fear. This system of punishment was cruel and abusive and it contravened regulations.

Bed-wetting or enuresis

7.111 Bed-wetting was a problem in Goldenbridge, as it was in other residential institutions. It was not confined to industrial schools, nor has it ceased to be a problem in residential homes for children. Children wet beds at night for a variety of reasons. It was probably more common in industrial schools because of the particular circumstances of the children sent there: they had to endure the stresses and strains associated with separation from their families and the anxieties of institutional life. The problem usually disappeared as children matured, but it left behind feelings of anxiety and resentment.

7.112 The practical problems were formidable. Bedclothes were made of materials such as calico and wool that were difficult to wash and dry quickly. Laundry facilities that might have been stretched in normal circumstances had to handle an increased volume of soiled bed linen. It has to be acknowledged, therefore, that bed-wetting constituted a major challenge to the facilities in an industrial school.

7.113 During Sr Alida's time, a child who wet her bed in Goldenbridge had to sleep in a particular dormitory where all the bed-wetters were gathered. In this dormitory, children were woken up at night and taken out to the toilet. Their bedding was inspected daily. Children who wet the bed had to take their sheets to be inspected, and they were punished, usually by being beaten.

7.114 Bed-wetters had their consumption of water restricted in an attempt to reduce the likelihood of an accident at night. Girls were thirsty as a result, and sought sources of water. This included drinking out of cisterns of toilets located near the dormitories. Some gave evidence that children drank out of the pan of the toilet. The attempt to prevent the intake of fluid proved to be largely unsuccessful.

7.115 Bed-wetting was not considered to be a difficulty that children occasionally experienced, but was instead seen as a failure of discipline.

7.116 In a report by Dr Moira Maguire and Professor Seamus O Cinneide, entitled 'Report for Newtownforbes Module', submitted by the Sisters of Mercy in respect of Newtownforbes Industrial School, the authors refer to medical knowledge that was available in the 1930s. The two references¹² used by the authors show that bed-wetting was recognised as a psychological problem as far back as the 1930s, with major causes being unhappiness and nervous strain. Treating the problem with harshness exacerbated it, according to the British texts:

In these cases ... the only cure is the removal of the cause of unhappiness – that is, not by treating the physical symptoms but by treating the child psychologically. Success, not failure, should always be stressed.

7.117 The Irish article recognised the lack of child guidance practice in Ireland, but advised that children who wet the bed should be encouraged with rewards rather than punished.

7.118 In Goldenbridge, bed-wetting was viewed as a punishable offence. The method of punishment and the place of the punishments varied. One witness recalled the punishment that was inflicted on her by Sr Bianca for wetting the bed:

When I wet the bed which was nearly every night, she would bring you into this room, it's called the linen room, it was a high room and a narrow room. She just proceeded to put me on the floor on my stomach, she put her left knee on my back, this was the punishment

¹² Irish Journal of Medical Science 1939, and 1938 textbooks on the care of young children published in Britain.

I was getting by the way for wetting the bed, and a big girl, just a big girl ... again, to me she was about 15 or 16 ... she had to hold my legs down, pull down my pants and Mother Bianca pulled up my top and proceeded to smack me really hard for a while on the bum.

7.119 Sr Bianca used a stick, and the witness recalled she was punished in this manner two or three times a week. When she first arrived in Goldenbridge, in the early 1950s, that was the regime.

7.120 She said that, when Sr Alida took over the running of the School in the mid-1950s, bed-wetters were sent to the landing to await their punishment. The witness also pointed out that children who were bed-wetters were not allowed to have a drink after 4 o'clock in the afternoon.

7.121 Another witness who was resident in the 1950s recalled the punishment she was given for wetting the bed. She was lined up in St Patrick's classroom, along with other bed-wetters, and slapped on the hand by Sr Alida. She also recalled her hair being pulled and her face being pushed into the wet sheets.

7.122 A complainant who persistently wet the bed recalled being beaten every morning. She also described the humiliation of sometimes having to parade her wet sheet in front of everyone:

Then there were other times I remember there was a recreation hall and those of us who had wet the bed on some occasions we had to go into the front hall and stand there and people were coming in and out. On other occasions we had to go into the recreation hall, again with the wet sheets, and the other children were encouraged to walk around and jeer us. They would call us wet-the-beds.

7.123 One complainant said that, after Sr Alida became Manager:

She took over and you were put on the landing when you wet the bed or when you did anything else bold but mainly for wetting the bed. I was all the time one of those people. She would leave you on the landing until she was ready to come up and smack you, and you could be there for a long time.

7.124 One witness, who was resident in the School in the 1960s and who regularly wet the bed until she was 14, stated that she was sent to the landing to await punishment and that she would be punished in the yard:

I was afraid to go to the toilet and that's why I wet the bed. I think when I look back I thought it was every night I was hit, I don't know how many times a week I was hit but I was hit for bed-wetting ... if it was discovered after a certain time you got hit down in the yard that was off the rec, you got hit there. I was either on the landing or in the rec, as we called it.

7.125 She stated that the beds of children who wet the bed were checked during the night time by one of the older girls and, if the bed was wet, the child would be woken up and put standing on the landing.

7.126 Another witness remembered:

I can remember praying every night that I wouldn't wet the bed because I knew that the next morning I would be severely beaten, reprimanded and I remember feeling very cold and standing naked and just the shame, just the absolute shame of it.

7.127 A complainant who continued to suffer from nocturnal enuresis for some years after she left the School recalled being beaten by Sr Alida in the classroom. She was also beaten on the landing and she continued to be punished for bed-wetting until she left Goldenbridge at the age of 16.

7.128 A woman described how, in the 1960s, her younger siblings were hit by the lay staff for wetting the bed. As the eldest child, she could not bear to hear them being slapped, because she *'felt every slap they got'*. As a result, she took preventive measures:

I found it very difficult because they were chastised in the mornings if they wet the beds. I couldn't bear that so I ended up waking up during the night and crawling under the beds up to the top beds to take the dry sheets off the other kids and bring them down to ... take the wet sheets off and just throw the dry sheets beside my brothers.

7.129 This complainant was approximately 10 years old when she was resorting to such measures to defend her siblings from being punished. For a child of such tender years, it was a very stressful experience for her. She told the Committee, *'I didn't get much sleep in the early days in the good few years while they wet the bed. I never really slept that well'*.

7.130 A male witness who was resident in Goldenbridge in the 1970s recalled being beaten on one occasion for wetting the bed. He had tried to conceal the wet sheets, but a nun came into the dormitory and discovered them and *'she did kind of batter me'*. This nun then threw him and the sheets into a bath. He conceded that this was not a regular event. The worst aspect of this incident was the humiliation and fear of wetting the bed: *'just the whole humiliation of the whole lot'*. Even to this day, he said he had a fear of wetting the bed: *'I would still have that fear. I would wake up during the night just in case because sometimes you would feel like I was going to the toilet'*.

7.131 Bed-wetting was an indication of emotional disturbance, yet the Sisters of Mercy used punishment relentlessly as a policy to deal with it, rather than analysing the reasons for the problem. The Sisters of Mercy acknowledge that it was not dealt with appropriately. They stated in their Opening Statement:

Unfortunately, one of the methods of trying to deal with the problem in the earlier part of the period under review was to try to jolt the child out of the habit by punishment.

7.132 They also conceded that older girls were punished for bed-wetting. They said that two of the tactics used with the younger children was to deprive them of fluids in the late evening and waking them during the night to take them to the toilet.

7.133 They acknowledged that the children who wet the bed would have suffered humiliation by 'the very reason of having to bring soiled sheets to the laundry basket'. Furthermore, they apologised for any hurt and pain caused by them in response to the issue of bed-wetting:

We further particularly regret the use of any form of punishment, including corporal punishment, in respect of children who suffered from a bedwetting problem. At the time it was thought that punishment would provide a deterrent in the erroneous belief that the child was able to control his or her bedwetting. In retrospect, we recognize that punishment for bedwetting must have been particularly traumatic, and that children who suffered from bedwetting, and punishment for bedwetting, had a particularly difficult time.

7.134 In their written Submissions, too, they accepted that corporal punishment and shaming tactics, such as making children parade their wet sheets in front of the other children, were used, but that it was likely from the evidence heard that such practices ceased after a certain point.

7.135 Sr Alida stated that bed-wetting was a huge problem during her early days in Goldenbridge. She asserted that they tried every possible means to counteract this problem, including waking children at 2am to go to the toilet. She stated that each child who had a persistent bed-wetting problem was sent to Dr. Steevens' Hospital for investigation. She also recalled that she received medical advice, around 1954, to cease the practice of waking children during the night.

7.136 Sr Alida denied beating any child for bed-wetting:

... For bed-wetting, I cannot account, I cannot account for bed-wetting, I didn't beat for bed-wetting. I beat for lots of other things.

7.137 She added that none of the lay staff had authority to deal with the problem of bed-wetting amongst the children and, in particular, they were not permitted to punish the children:

[The staff] had never any authority to punish children for bed-wetting that I know of, I never gave it to anybody. I don't remember myself taking anybody in the line, beating them for bed-wetting ... I have no recollection of ever having children on the landing for bed-wetting.

7.138 However, under cross-examination she conceded that she had in fact slapped children for bed-wetting. When asked whether she accepted that she had slapped children for bed-wetting, she responded, 'I suppose I have to. I slapped a lot more than I am happy to be thinking of these days'.

7.139 She continued to deny that she lined up bed-wetters in St Patrick's classroom for punishment, or that children were made to parade with their wet sheets.

- 7.140**
- **Corporal punishment was used as punishment for bed-wetting long after the 1950s, contrary to what was asserted by Sr Alida and the Congregation. Witnesses who were in Goldenbridge in the 1960s, and even the 1970s, gave evidence of being beaten for wetting the bed at night.**
 - **The methods of dealing with bed-wetting proved to be wholly unsuccessful, but they were continued over many years and under different Managers. If the management had sought to create conditions in which it was probable that children would wet their beds, the steps adopted could scarcely have been chosen with more effect. They set up a cycle of behaviour by the children and by the authorities which, instead of tending to eradicate the problem, actually exacerbated it. The combination of measures resulted in more extensive bed-wetting and for longer periods in the child's life than would otherwise have been the case. The pattern of identification, exposure, segregation, differential treatment, embarrassment and humiliation was completed by punishment when the predictable and almost inevitable result came about.**

Informal punishments

7.141 Witnesses spoke of other ways in which corporal punishment was administered unfairly and undeservedly. They claimed it was used so commonly that it was impossible to avoid it. One witness, who was in Goldenbridge in the 1940s from seven years of age, told the Committee:

I would stand there and when you hear the noise and the shouting, the roaring and the screaming, then what did I used to do I used to stand there with urine running down my legs with the fear of knowing that whatever you were going to do, whatever you were going to say ... you couldn't say anything, if you looked at them you got clattered. If you looked away you got clattered. If you put your head down you got clattered. So what could you do? I used to try and disappear into the ether ... You knew that you could never get away from the cruelty. You couldn't escape and take yourself off.

7.142 Many witnesses testified that there was no way that they could avoid being slapped, whether for behaviour regarded as seriously wrong or for something trivial, or indeed for no apparent reason. When punishment was administered, there was no necessary correlation between the seriousness of the infraction and the severity of the beating.

- 7.143** There was no body of rules governing the occasions or the circumstances in which punishment would be administered. There was no punishment book. Records were not kept as to the punishments imposed. Staff were not instructed as to what was permissible.
- 7.144** The absence of any obligation to record punishment meant that the infliction of punishment was, in practice, unregulated. There is general acceptance that punishment happened too often and too severely and in an unrecorded and unregulated manner.
- 7.145** The absence of rules meant that the children did not know how to avoid punishment. Without a clear system in place to make punishment predictable and avoidable, the children lived in fear, and those in authority became indifferent to good order and discipline in themselves. The adults were given so much autonomy that they alone decided whether to give punishment or not, and they alone decided what warranted it. They decided how much punishment was given and in what manner it was administered.
- 7.146** It should have been the case that the Manager, or somebody deputed on her behalf for that purpose, administer the punishment and then record it. The actuality was different. The nun in charge of the girls or her assistant regularly and frequently administered punishment with a stick. The respondent evidence was that it was confined to slapping on the hands and then in moderate quantity. There was, however, a preponderance of persuasive evidence to the contrary, that slapping was not confined in that way. Instead, it could happen that a child would be struck on the hand or arm, or indeed on the legs or some other part of the body.
- 7.147** Children were sometimes punished by being locked into a room, described as the furnace, and one witness described a particularly terrifying experience when she had offended one of the care workers and found herself locked in. She could not remember how long she was there, but screamed all the time. Care assistants also punished the children. These workers had grown up in Goldenbridge and knew no other method of coping with children. They were scarcely more than children themselves, and their moral responsibility for what they were doing was slight by comparison with others in higher positions in the ladder of authority.
- 7.148** A former teacher, now of advanced years, gave compelling evidence of the environment generally and the state of the children in Goldenbridge during her years. On the issue of punishment, she said that she used a ruler for most of her time in preference to a leather strap, which she had been given at the beginning of her career but which she had rejected when she accidentally discovered how painful it was. When she was asked whether she used the flat of the ruler or the edge of it, as some witnesses had testified, she candidly acknowledged that sometimes she used the edge, when children had particularly annoyed her.

Climate of fear

- 7.149** Many complainants gave evidence of living in a perpetual state of fear in Goldenbridge. Children were punished for trivial misdemeanours.
- 7.150** A complainant who spent the 1950s in Goldenbridge recalled that *'the beatings were constant'*. This witness gave evidence of one occasion when she was the only child on the landing waiting for punishment. Sr Alida took her into her cell and called Sr Venetia to join them. The complainant was told to take off her nightdress, and she was then beaten by both nuns. Sr Venetia used her hand, but Sr Alida beat her with the stick across the buttocks and on the hands. She said it was a more severe punishment than usual and that she did not know what she had done to merit it.
- 7.151** A further complainant, who was resident in Goldenbridge from 1954 until 1966, recalled being punished by Sr Alida:

... If you were walking say down the thing, she would say, "what are you doing here?" And she would lash out at you. "You dirty article", she would just give you a lash out. Like being on the wet-the-bed line. I was always so frightened of her. When I used to see her I used to shiver inside.

- 7.152** A complainant, who spent the 1960s in Goldenbridge, remembered Sr Alida as being particularly severe:

Sr Alida was extremely cruel. She beat children, she had us standing on landings where she beat us. She beat us down in St. Patrick's for having wet sheets. We were beaten in the yard for having wet sheets, for wetting the bed. You couldn't pass her, you were just terrified passing her. The swish of her. You would see her coming.

- 7.153** A complainant, who spent a number of years in Goldenbridge, gave evidence of the fear induced by Sr Venetia:

There was one person you were frightened to look at with her blue eyes and her pale skin ... She had a dreadful habit, I don't know why she did it, you had to stand in a half circle with you. She would come behind you, her presence, as she passed, you always thought you were going to get a whack on the legs. She had a dreadful habit of (indicating) "who can I smell?" We all knew we smelled. Is she going to pick us?

- 7.154** This complainant recalled being punished on a regular basis by Sr Venetia. She said that Sr Venetia would beat children for wetting the bed, and she also recalled being beaten by her on the legs during Irish Dancing classes, for not raising her legs high enough:

Sr Venetia had a way that you had to stand a distance from her. She never got close to you. She stood so far and you stood and your hands at all times had to be out straight ... If you bent your elbows she would come close to you then and she would just whack those elbows. In the end, you just held your arms out. Sometimes you would just think to yourself "when is she going to stop?" She had this way of looking at you, I don't know. She seemed to get redder and redder as somebody who was hitting you, whereas she was quite a pale person any other time. She seemed to get into this frenzied type look. She was a very cruel woman.

- 7.155** Another resident from the mid-1950s until the mid-1960s, recalled a high level of physical abuse in Goldenbridge. On a regular basis, she was slapped with a cane, even as a very small child. She later said:

Physical abuse was part and parcel of everyday life in Goldenbridge. Sr Venetia would have many, many times abused me physically and verbally. It didn't have to be for anything specific. It could be your laces weren't tied or it could be your hair was untidy. It could be that she didn't like the look of you that particular day.

- 7.156** A complainant who was in Goldenbridge for 10 years from the mid-1960s stated that her initial memories of Goldenbridge were of hitting, taunting and name-calling, and that she was constantly in front of Sr Venetia, who slapped her with a hand brush for minor misdemeanours. She recalled being beaten on one occasion because she had a button missing from her nightdress. This complainant asserted that Sr Venetia called her names, either that she was dirty or that she was 'man mad'.

- 7.157** On one occasion, this complainant, who was only seven years of age at the time, suffered from diarrhoea during the night. She had an accident on her way to the bathroom, and the next morning, when questioned, she denied being responsible. Nevertheless, she was sent to Sr Venetia and was identified as the culprit. Sr Venetia slapped her with the hand brush, and she was slapped

by everybody who had any dealings with the situation at all, including the lay workers on the dormitory.

- 7.158** One witness from the 1950s and 1960s said that occasionally you would get a smack across the face from Sr Venetia when she checked the rosary beads in the evening, but on the whole she did not have any complaint about Sr Venetia. She later said:

She never actually hurt me. I am here for myself. She never actually hurt me ... she would slap but she wasn't cruel. What I mean by a slap, I never saw her giving anybody a hiding.

- 7.159** She contrasted Sr Venetia to some of the lay workers who were there, whom she described as very cruel.

- 7.160** This complainant, as with so many other complainants, was able to make the distinction between the corporal punishment administered by Sr Venetia and that administered by the lay care workers and by Sr Alida. Sr Venetia was not perceived as being unfair, cruel or brutal. She was singled out as having taken action when complaints by the girls were made to her about the treatment meted out to one of the younger children by the lay workers.

- 7.161** Another unusual complaint was that children were put into the large, industrial-sized tumble dryers. Complainants named lay staff, other children and, in one instance, Sr Alida as being responsible. The dryer was not turned on when the children were put into it, but they found it a very frightening experience.

- 7.162** One complainant recalled being put into the tumble dryer by some of the older girls:

There was a dryer on the right-hand side, quite a rounded looking thing, not like what you would see a dryer today and it was quite a lot off the floor. One of them picked me up and put me in there and they shut the door. I can see one of their faces now looking in that.

- 7.163** In the Crowley Report, Sr Venetia confirmed the allegations in respect of the tumble dryer. Sr Alida acknowledged to Mr Crowley about being confronted by a parent for threatening to place her daughter in the tumble dryer. In evidence, she said that a person had come to her to tell her that her child was afraid of the tumble dryer and advised her about it.

Allegations of abuse perpetrated by lay workers

- 7.164** The Investigation Committee heard a number of allegations against lay workers who were employed in the Institution. There were three different categories of lay worker in Goldenbridge.

- 7.165** There were four teachers in the internal primary school, two of whom were nuns, together with two lay teachers.

- 7.166** The second category of lay worker was the staff who looked after kitchens and dormitories and who were, to a very large extent, the people at the centre of childcare in Goldenbridge. These lay workers were responsible for the day-to-day running of the Institution, but were of course subject to the authority of the Resident Manager and her Assistant Sister at the time. Their task was mainly to assist with the supervision of the children before and after school hours. They worked in shifts, two on and two off. The lay staff were not trained in any aspects of childcare.

- 7.167** In the third category were former pupils who were retained as helpers, at the expiry of their detention orders at the age of 16. Sr Alida stated that there were only three former pupils towards the end of her tenure in Goldenbridge who were retained as helpers, although this number was greater in the earlier years. She said:

There were two or three girls who had no motivation to leave, had difficulty of their own; one was severely handicapped mentally and incapable of making her own way in the world, the other had a very serious speech defect and I cannot put down exactly, obesity I suppose I would say for the third, which we tried to get treated and it didn't change. They would be the only three past pupils that were working in the school that I can remember in my time.

- 7.168** Sr Alida's description of the former pupils who were retained to look after the other children and work in the Industrial School would suggest they were entirely unsuitable to work with children.
- 7.169** One complainant, who was in Goldenbridge between from the early 1950s to the late 1960s, spoke at length about the care workers who were there. She described many of them as very cruel. She described one incident where she was being administered cod liver oil by a care worker, and when it was her turn she said, *'Thank you, Ms Rafter'*,¹³ with a smile on her face. She said that this infuriated the care worker, who dragged her into a linen room, threw her on a table and took off her underpants. She hit her from head to toe with a hand brush, and then put a nappy on her.
- 7.170** She said that, on another occasion, she was beaten for making a comment while she was watching television. She ran away as a result of this, but was brought back. She told Sr Venetia that she had run away because she was sick of being hit. She said she doesn't believe her complaint had any impact on Sr Venetia, but that, on a subsequent occasion, one of the smaller children had come up to her and her friends with no clothes on and full of bruises. When they asked her what was wrong, she said that Ms Rafter had hit her because she had worn her knickers in bed. This complainant and her friends went to Sr Venetia and said that they would go to the *Evening Press* or the *Herald* if the beatings didn't stop and *'all those kind of, what we classed as carers now, they were gone in two weeks. They were cruel'*.
- 7.171** This complainant named four care workers, who were all removed very shortly after the complaints had been made to Sr Venetia. This complainant said that Goldenbridge did improve after that had occurred, although it still was not a nice place.
- 7.172** Another complainant, who was in Goldenbridge between the mid-1950s and the mid-1960s, said that one carer, who looked after the babies, stood out in her mind as being very kind to the children. She said that she was one of the inmates of the Institution who had been kept on and given a job there. Another former resident, who remained in the School to work as a carer, stood out in her memory: she described her as a product of the system. She often woke the children up in the morning, and she would sometimes lift a mattress and throw it onto the floor with the child on it. This complainant said that Ms Thornton¹⁴ was *'a very very aggressive woman'*.
- 7.173** This complainant had a certain amount of compassion and understanding for Ms Thornton, and said: *'She never knew any different, she grew up in the system. When I think now in retrospect I kind of feel sorry for her'*.
- 7.174** This witness recalls another staff member, who was a woman of very, very low intellect, who used to put her hands up the children's skirts if they were carrying anything into the kitchen or washing dishes. Again, the complainant had compassion and understanding and did not blame this person.
- 7.175** She talked about a third incident, where a minder threw her into a swimming pool when they were on holidays in Rathdrum. She said that this minder used to treat her badly if there was a nun

¹³ This is a pseudonym.

¹⁴ This is a pseudonym.

around to witness it, *'She done that to get attention from the nun that was approaching. It was just a case of silly behaviour'*.

- 7.176** What clearly emerged from the evidence of this witness is that, although she was subjected to abuse herself, she does not hold the lay workers responsible because they were either so damaged by the system themselves or they were intellectually incapable of understanding what they were doing. In many ways, this is a view that is reflected by a number of complainants, and it is more a reflection on the authorities in Goldenbridge, who employed these unfortunate women and left them in charge of children, than on the women themselves.
- 7.177** A complainant, who was in Goldenbridge from the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s, also spoke at some length about the lay staff. She mentioned a lay member of staff and said that she was worse than Sr Alida: *'She was allowed to run riot. She brutalised the children'*. She said that these people were not teachers, but were carers and supervised the children. She said that the older inmates in the Institution did all the work like washing, bead making and looking after the children, but these carers supervised all of that. This complainant also spoke about being a personal maid to one of the care staff. She said that she cleaned her room, put on her hot water bottle, made her bed, cleaned her floor, ironed her clothes and generally looked after her.
- 7.178** The witnesses who attended Goldenbridge in the late 1950s and 1960s were vocal in their criticism of the care workers who were in the Institution at that time. The main criticism is that these young girls, who had themselves come through Goldenbridge, were unsupervised and uncontrolled by the authorities in Goldenbridge. This does not seem to have been as big a complaint while Sr Alida was the nun in charge of the day-to-day running of the Institution but when Sr Venetia took over the day-to-day management, this did emerge as a major issue.
- 7.179** A witness complained of being badly beaten by Ms Rafter, who was the subject of an earlier complaint to Sr Venetia and was finally removed by her in the late 1960s. This complainant also identified Ms Thornton who she said beat a girl in the dining hall, *'Ms Thornton was violent, she was a very violent person. She was another one that you were frightened to look at'*.
- 7.180** This complainant again made the point that, at this stage, Goldenbridge was being run and looked after by lay staff and older girls. She said that, although the nuns were there and Sr Venetia was in charge, the real running of the Institution was left to lay staff.
- 7.181** Another complainant spoke about her experience in Goldenbridge and was quite frank about the impact her experience had on her own personal development. She said that a lot of the actions taken in Goldenbridge were done deliberately to embarrass and humiliate the children. She said *'I'll put it like this, I find a lot of the women who looked after us, including Sr Venetia, I find a lot of them in me. I will do things to embarrass people if I don't like them. I try not to'*.
- 7.182** Another complainant singled out Ms Thornton as being particularly cruel. She said that she had a grudge against an awful lot of people. She said that, on one occasion, when she tried to intervene because Ms Thornton was hitting her brother, Ms Thornton twisted her arm and actually broke it. She said that she was too terrified of Ms Thornton to tell Sr Venetia what had happened, and so she told her that she had hurt it in the washing machine. She was afraid that, if she had told on Ms Thornton, her little brother would have been victimised by her.
- 7.183** She said that Ms Thornton was particularly cruel to the little boys, and that she told other girls about this, and eventually it got back to Sr Venetia, but she only got beaten and had her head shaved by a member of the lay staff as a result.

- 7.184** One complainant who was in Goldenbridge in the 1960s was one of the most condemnatory of the lay staff in Goldenbridge. She described a regime where the unqualified and largely ill-educated lay staff were effectively out of control and administering severe physical punishment.
- 7.185** Abuse by lay staff became a major feature of life in Goldenbridge in the 1950s and 1960s and continued until, eventually in 1966, Sr Venetia removed four particularly abusive lay staff members, and conditions improved thereafter.
- 7.186** This complainant's recollection is of one of those staff members who was finally complained about to Sr Venetia, and she describes her as *'an absolute demon'*. She recalls her dragging her off a bed in the dormitory, pulling off her clothes and beating her in front of other girls. She said that she boxed her, kicked her and threw her to the floor. She was left in a very bad state, and that night woke up screaming in her sleep. Somebody went and got Sr Venetia, who was told what had happened to her, but as far as she knew that was the end of the matter. This complainant says that, some time later, another child received a similar beating from Ms Rafter. She said:
- I was finished, I was shattered, I couldn't fight any more, I was finished. I just felt utterly hopeless, it was over, I could have died, I didn't care. She broke my spirit completely and I had plenty of it but she broke it and it has taken me years and years and years to recover any of it and I still will never get over that woman.*
- 7.187** This complainant said that this lay staff worker was often in charge of the recreation hall. She said that this was a huge room, and was used for recreation if the weather prevented the children from going outside. She said:
- We used to go into that room and you would have to sit like this (indicating) your finger on your lip (indicating) and you dare not move and I mean move or display any body language. If you looked and caught your friend's eye across the other side of the room or if you winked or blinked or anything there was this orgy of violence that followed. Nothing short of an orgy of violence.*
- 7.188** The complainant said that the nuns were never present during any of this, that they were always in the convent. She said that these lay workers, not just Ms Rafter, but others whom she named, kicked the children, pulled off their clothes, pulled them by their hair, beat them and battered them. She said she would never forget those fights as long as she lived, and that she has had to live with it almost every day of her life. She said she recalls one little girl getting an appalling beating because she asked one of the carers *'Is your name Ms Rafter?'*. She said that those carers should have been named as respondents and been forced to answer for what they did. She said this was something that happened every day, especially in the wintertime, but she said it was not just in the recreation hall, it also happened in the dormitories after the nun had gone back to the convent.
- 7.189** Another complainant, who was in Goldenbridge in the 1960s, also spoke about the bullying that went on in the School. Again, this is a complaint that was not seen in the 1940s and 1950s, when there appeared to be a great deal more control over the School. By the 1960s, undoubtedly the issue of bullying had arisen. This complainant said that there were a lot of bullies in the School, and that it was survival of the fittest. She said that this bullying was conducted by members of the staff and that, as a child, she found that these people did not care. She said that they were doing their job, but that there was a great deal of punishment. She said that these lay people had a great deal of power and they inflicted severe beatings.
- 7.190** Another complainant who was in Goldenbridge in the early 1960s was a small boy when admitted. He remembers getting beatings, particularly for bed-wetting. He said:

You had girls in charge. You had nuns, then you had outsiders, you had elder girls put in charge of the younger ones, they used to give as nearly as much beatings as what the

nuns did for certain things. After being out of there and you think back, these girls were brought up with that sort of treatment and they portrayed that on younger kids. They were in there for years so that is all they knew, but you were underneath these people 'cos they were bigger and stronger and there longer, so you were getting it at every angle.

7.191 Sr Alida in her evidence stated that lay staff were not authorised to slap children and that, as far as she knew, they did not do so. She said that, as far as she was aware, she and Sr Bianca, or later she and Sr Venetia, were the only persons who administered corporal punishment in the School, and the lay staff left any problems for them to deal with.

7.192 She also said that she believed that the two lay workers who were left in charge while she and Sr Venetia went over to the convent in the evenings had a difficult task maintaining discipline, and that was why there would be children waiting for her on the landing.

Discrimination

7.193 Witnesses complained that children were not all treated alike in Goldenbridge. They were protected to some extent if they had a relative who visited them regularly. Favouritism was a complaint made particularly by witnesses who were in Goldenbridge during the 1960s.

7.194 A complainant, who was aged nine in the early 1960s, described the difference in the way that children were treated. This witness and her siblings were placed in care on the death of their mother, and she noticed particularly how two members of another family were treated so differently that it came as a shock to her to realise they were sisters. Whereas one girl was favoured as a pet, the other was treated with extreme cruelty and was often seen waiting on the landing for punishment.

7.195 Another complainant, objecting to favouritism, remarked that the very fact that the nuns and lay staff were capable of forming attachments with certain children demonstrated that they knew how to treat children properly and show them love and affection:

It was wrong there was no need for it, why couldn't they treat us all like pets, why not? That's a choice they exercised.

7.196 A witness, who was five years old when he was committed to Goldenbridge, gave evidence. He was transferred to Artane when he was nine years old. He stated that, before he was committed to institutional care:

I was a happy, young little kid and I believe I was turned into a nervous wreck in these places.

7.197 He was emotionally upset by the death of his mother and was a regular bed-wetter. He was left-handed and was constantly beaten for it in class. This vulnerability made him an obvious target for bullies. He summed up his situation as follows:

I remember just constantly getting beaten. Even in the classroom being nervous, and left handed, you weren't allowed to do things left handed, the devil was in you, you were told ... From constant beatings I had a stutter and I had a turn in my eye as well, and I used to get an awful time off the rest of the kids.

7.198 The Sisters of Mercy in their Submission accepted that this complainant's circumstances made him more vulnerable.

A change in atmosphere

- 7.199** Many complainants gave evidence that the atmosphere in the School improved under Sr Venetia's management. She did not resort to physical punishment to the same extent as her predecessor. One complainant described her relief when Sr Alida left in the early 1960s:

I was relieved when she left. I was relieved to the extent that I knew Sr Venetia had done some things, but she was still never on a par with Sr Alida, where bullying and beatings and things were concerned ... I got some beatings from Sr Venetia, but she would never have – let's face it when somebody is beating you they are not happy and smiling. She would never have had that harshness in her face or in her voice that Alida had, that horrible horrible venom that was dished out for me by Sr Alida.

- 7.200** Another complainant described the relief after Sr Alida left, and stated that the children were happier:

I felt personally that there was an air of lightness in the place ... it just seemed that there was something – there was a little bit of fear gone ... We didn't have to see that big figure coming down the hall, and if you were running or anything like that, and getting a slap on the head. That's the way I used to be afraid, you would see the big black figure.

- 7.201** At the same time, the witness added that Sr Venetia was moody, which could create a tense, uncertain environment:

Sometimes I found her alright. I think it depended on her mood. She did punish severely as well.

- 7.202** Another difference between the two nuns was that Sr Venetia was verbally cruel and sarcastic, and witnesses spoke about how they were hurt by her comments. One witness recalled how Sr Venetia deliberately ridiculed her because her mother had spent time in a psychiatric hospital:

She used the term "cracked like your mother" many, many times. I used to live in fear of her coming into my view because – I was terrified that she would say these words.

Evidence of respondents

- 7.203** Sr Alida stated in evidence that, during most of her time in Goldenbridge, there were 150 children and four staff members. In order to maintain discipline, she had to be very controlling. Given the nature of the work and the constraints under which the staff operated, she stated that it was very possible that staff were bad tempered.

- 7.204** It was the system that obliged her to use corporal punishment as often as she did. She explained:

Today I would hate to think of the things I had to do or the things I did, but in the system as it was I don't know what resolution there was to it. Maybe it was a too easy situation to get rid of a problem, instead of sitting down to talk or to advise you slapped and that was the end of the problem.

- 7.205** She asserted that she never saw anybody else use a slapper except for Sr Venetia. She said, 'Lay people could give a clout with their hand but that would be the most that I would see them doing'. She said that no lay person ever beat the children, as far as she knew, nor did they have authority to punish the children in any manner.

- 7.206** Sr Alida had a clear memory of children being on the landing during Sr Bianca's time, but she had no real memory of that being a feature of her time there. Although she could remember chastising a child on the landing, it was not on a regular basis. She also said that lay staff did not chastise children but left it for her to deal with.

- 7.207** Sr Alida maintained that she and Sr Venetia were the only persons who administered corporal punishment in the School: the lay staff were not authorised to slap children and, as far as she was aware, they did not do so.
- 7.208** Ms Garvin,¹⁵ formerly a Sister of Mercy who had worked as an assistant teacher in Goldenbridge from the early 1960s to the mid-1970s, was adamant that, while there was corporal punishment, it was not excessive.
- 7.209** Sr Gianna¹⁶ gave evidence to the Investigation Committee. She worked as an assistant in the School from 1960 until she took her final vows as a Sister of Mercy a few years later. She stated that, although Sr Alida used a stick for corporal punishment, it would cause no more than temporary discomfort to a child. She agreed that it could leave bruising on a child's body, but she said she never witnessed such injuries.
- 7.210** Both the above witnesses said that they believed the atmosphere was very good in Goldenbridge and that the children were happy there.

The Crowley Report

- 7.211** Among the discovered documents was a report commissioned by the Sisters of Mercy in 1996 on the conditions of life in Goldenbridge. It was commissioned to prepare the Congregation for the television programme 'Dear Daughter' and its aftermath.
- 7.212** The 'Dear Daughter' programme was shown on RTE in February 1996, and it produced a massive response from the media and the public. Complaints were made to the Gardaí and an investigation followed, but there were no prosecutions. The Congregation was aware that the programme was being planned and that serious allegations would be made about how children had been treated in Goldenbridge. In advance of the screening of the programme, the Congregation decided to find out what it could about conditions in the Institution. One of the first things that it did was to commission a professional childcare expert to give an initial assessment of the allegations, and that inquiry gave rise to the first apology that the Sisters of Mercy issued in February 1996, following the screening of the programme.
- 7.213** The preliminary inquiry was undertaken by a senior social worker with the Western Health Board. His brief was to develop an assessment of the allegations being made regarding the care received by children in Goldenbridge in the 1950s and 1960s. Mr Crowley gathered information from the following sources:
- Transcript of the Gay Byrne interview with Ms Christine Buckley in 1993.
 - A meeting with Mr Louis Lentin, the producer of the programme that was going to be shown on RTE.
 - A meeting with a former resident of Goldenbridge.
 - Meeting with Sr Alida.
 - Meeting with Sr Venetia.
 - Report and feedback from Sr Bettina¹⁷ on her interviews with former residents.

- 7.214** Mr Crowley approached his task in two ways. Firstly, he sought to establish and clarify the broad nature and patterns of the allegations being made. Secondly, he examined the information and carried out interviews, with a view to forming an independent professional assessment of the general nature of the care provided in Goldenbridge in the context of the allegations.

¹⁵ This is a pseudonym.

¹⁶ This is a pseudonym.

¹⁷ This is a pseudonym.

7.215 He identified four areas of complaint which were interrelated. They were physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, and neglect of children's basic needs. Mr Crowley compiled a summary of allegations that were made about the regime:

Physical Abuse

1. A constant pattern of physical abuse.
2. Severe beatings resulting in children being physically marked was the dominant form of discipline.
3. The beatings were carried out by a number of lay staff but most especially by Sr Alida. Beatings were so routine that they were witnessed by and colluded with by all members of staff.
4. Children were deprived of food.
5. Children were kept awake late into the evenings while awaiting physical punishments and were thus deprived of sleep.
6. Children were deprived of heating and warmth.
7. Children were routinely involved in inappropriate physical tasks connected with maintaining the establishment.
8. Some of the severe punishments were inflicted in circumstances in which there were sexual and humiliating elements including, for example, public and forceful removal of clothes before physical punishment.
9. Children were not clear as to why they were being beaten.
10. Children lived in constant fear of experiencing and witnessing physical abuse.

Emotional Abuse

11. Routine derogatory references to the children's background and to their parent's behaviour.
12. Verbal abuse which combined with other interactions had the effect of reinforcing negative self images and damaging self confidence and feelings of worth.
13. Denial of appropriate recreation.
14. Imposing onerous responsibilities on children who were too young to carry them out, such as taking responsibility for the care of other children.
15. Public humiliation of children suffering from bed-wetting and soiling and making them display wet and soiled sheets publicly to other children.
16. Children were constantly in fear.
17. Children's emotional needs were neither understood nor responded to.
18. Favouritism.
19. Deprivation was made worse for children when they saw some others being treated as pets and getting better treatment.

Sexual Abuse

20. Children were exposed to sexually abusive experiences by befriending families and employers with whom they were placed.
21. No proper assessment or supervision or aftercare arrangements were made to prevent these abuses.
22. Some care practices reflected insensitivity to adolescent sexuality.
23. Two former residents alleged cases of specific sexual abuse, one by a male member of staff and one by two female members of staff.

Neglect of Children's Basic Needs

24. The total organisation of the children's daily routine was contrary to their developing needs.
25. There was a failure at all levels to understand or meet their needs.
26. The general climate and regime were excessively harsh and abusive even by the standards of the time.
27. Expectations about children, for example, in relation to the length of time they were expected to concentrate or to stay silent or to work were not normal.
28. Particular forms of punishment, such as being left alone for hours in the furnace room, were particularly frightening for children who had experienced traumatic separations.
29. Generally, there was an absence of consistent and positive adults to whom supportive attachment could develop.

7.216 He interviewed Sr Alida and Sr Venetia, and put these allegations to them and noted their responses. The statements made by these two nuns are of real importance in the Inquiry because they come from people who worked in Goldenbridge over a combined period from 1942 until 1972.

7.217 Mr Crowley formed the impression that Sr Alida was well prepared for the interview, and that she energetically attempted to direct the focus and pace of the discussion. Whilst she regularly stated that she could not remember events, this memory lapse was not consistent across the range of topics covered: it appeared to relate principally to material that was critical of her.

7.218 She presented as a 'committed and energetic person, who appeared well defended psychologically'. Mr Crowley found her very controlling in her interaction, 'but this may be related to her evident need to control her feelings'.

7.219 Mr Crowley reported as follows on his interview with Sr Alida:

Sr Alida described her initiation to Goldenbridge as being told not to talk or take the attitude of Sr Felisa,¹⁸ who had been working with the children in care and had been critical of the service.

Sr Alida recalls her early years in religious life as being dominated by fear. On reflection she cannot understand how she accepted so many demands and pressures without protest.

She was trained by Sr Bianca, whom she describes as a very large powerful woman with a harsh aggressive and unpredictable personality.

On reflection Sr Alida perceived the policies and practices of the 1950s and 1960s as being based on ignorance and failing to understand or care appropriately for the children.

The use of former residents as staff was influenced by limited finance and tended to be limited to those who could not survive in aftercare. These were probably the most unsuitable people to care for vulnerable children. Older residents also cared for younger children in a semi formal system. She described much of the care as being "gang care".

Sr Alida identified Ms O'Shea¹⁹ as being one former resident who she understood was physically abusive.

¹⁸ This is a pseudonym.

¹⁹ This is a pseudonym.

Sr Alida, in effect, acknowledged that she continuously shouted and beat children “too much and too long” and used a stick routinely. She tended to go to bed very late and this led to children being kept on the landing.

Sr Alida acknowledges being confronted by a parent for threatening to place her daughter in the tumble dryer, she confirmed children’s involvement in activities such as grass cutting with their hands but minimised the impact on children.

Hunger and humiliation were acknowledged with regret, when discussed in general terms, however specific allegations tended to be met with long silences and eventual comments such as “It could have happened accidentally”.

Sr Alida did not in effect reject the substance of the allegations.

7.220 Sr Venetia worked in Goldenbridge for many years and became Resident Manager in the 1960s.

7.221 Mr Crowley conducted a lengthy interview with Sr Venetia. She was in some physical pain and discomfort because of her medical condition during the course of the interview, but she had no obvious difficulties with memory. Mr Crowley observed that the allegations were weighing heavily on Sr Venetia and she presented as resigned to the process of being interviewed. It was evident to Mr Crowley that she wished to be honest and forthright, but this was complicated somewhat by ambivalence and conflicting loyalties. Mr Crowley was satisfied that she made every effort to be honest, but it was clear to him that she had some difficulty in discussing issues such as sexual abuse and, in general, she did not volunteer new information. He said ‘Sr Venetia communicated generally as being a somewhat fearful and isolated person.’

7.222 Mr. Crowley reported:

Sr Venetia described the care system and organisational structure as having been established by Sr Bianca who died.... She initially described Sr Bianca as a hard and rigid woman but over the course of the interview it emerged that she viewed Sr Bianca as a paranoid schizophrenic who she considered was grossly insulting to adults and children and who in effect established a reign of terror.

Sr Venetia communicated that subsequent managers maintained many of the features of the system as established, without substantial reflection but gradually modified and improved the care arrangements.

Sr Venetia confirmed that the general atmosphere was excessively and consistently cruel even relative to standards of the time. She confirmed that fear of and actual physical beatings and verbal abuse was a matter of routine and that the general account of children, for example, waiting on the landings was accurate. Wetting was defined as a crime and, therefore, punishable through humiliation and physical beatings. Sr Venetia confirmed the allegations in relation to the tumble dryer and drinking from the toilet cistern. She also confirmed the bead making and that failure to obey rules was normally punishable by physical beatings.

Sr Venetia made particular reference to one member of the lay staff, who was employed by Sr Bianca and subsequently fired. It was very evident that Sr Venetia was very afraid of this staff member and that the children were terrified of this person. Sr Venetia was quite fearful and reluctant in any discussion of sexual abuse.

Essentially Sr Venetia confirmed that the essential elements of the allegations were correct and it was clear that she was of the view that almost anything could have occurred in a very unsafe environment.

7.223 Mr Crowley was guarded in his report. He cautioned that the sample of former pupils from whom he had obtained information was not randomly drawn, and he said that it could be expected that other women might have different experiences in relation to Goldenbridge. He warned that caution

would have to be exercised about any particular allegation that arose from early childhood experience, especially in regard to the identity of the perpetrator, and that there was a particular danger of confusion occurring between Sr Bianca and Sr Alida. He made clear that the allegations of the former residents had been listened to without challenge or cross-examination, and that his interviews with the Sisters were structured to maximise participation and effective communication, and that he consciously did not structure inquiries in a manner that might have been experienced as interrogatory or pressurising. He noted that Sr Alida initially requested, but subsequently cancelled, a second interview. He also advised that substantial information would continue to emerge as more former residents were interviewed. But, having set out all these cautions, Mr Crowley was satisfied that it was possible to establish a broad picture of the care practices in Goldenbridge during the period.

7.224 Mr Crowley ended his report with comments expressed as a 'Conclusion', followed by observations headed 'General Commentary':

Conclusion

Clear and consistent patterns can be identified in the allegations. The various accounts are consistent with each individual recalling personal experiences which reinforce the overall picture. The accounts are accompanied with appropriate feeling and a richness of detail. The accounts of subsequent life stories and relationship issues are consistent with the childhood experiences as described.

Those former residents who have been interviewed have been experienced as credible.

Some of the care practices may be understood by reference to the harsh historical context. Some actions experienced as abusive may not have had such intent, but were experienced as such due to insensitivity, ignorance and a failure to communicate. Other actions, such as forbidding liquids to bed wetters, may have had unintended consequences, such as children drinking from toilets at night.

However, the broad nature and pattern of the allegations, which have in effect been confirmed by the sisters with management responsibility, namely physical and emotional abuse, are clearly accurate descriptions of the experiences of children in Goldenbridge.

The care arrangements did not meet children's basic needs. Children experienced physical and emotional abuse and were almost certainly exposed to sexual abuse.

A number of the particular incidents described were violent and sadistic. The entire regime was unsafe and was characterised by a pervasive controlling of children through fear.

General Commentary

The children cared for in Goldenbridge had, prior to their reception into care, experienced gross neglect, deprivation and multiple trauma. They were often rejected by their immediate and extended family and by the broader society. They were admitted in large numbers to a service which could not even begin to provide an appropriate level of care.

The physical environment was totally unstable and did not facilitate either supervision or privacy. The financial resources were grossly inadequate and determined the availability of personnel and material necessities.

The Care System and culture was created by a dominant and dysfunctional personality. The religious sisters who subsequently held management responsibility lived in a tightly controlled and authoritarian world. Questioning was defined as arrogance and led to blaming of the individual. The most extreme example of this was Sr Alida's account of how her request to be released from teaching to concentrate on care was responded to by a decision to immediately transfer her to Co. Wicklow.

No distinction appears to have been made between being a 'good' religious and being a 'good' childcare worker. The characteristics that were valued appear to have been obedience and dedication.

No professional training was available to provide understanding or direction to service organisation or therapeutic interventions. Consequently the only available models were adopted with the corporal punishment in school becoming the beatings in the care centre and the daily routine and practices of religious life determining the day to day life of young children.

Religious sisters and lay staff operated under constant pressure and clearly worked hard at an impossible task.

The unsafe world of Goldenbridge developed a very particular culture which could not meet the needs of children. Very powerless people had enormous and immediate power over troubled and troublesome children. The abuse of the power and powerlessness was almost inevitable.

Almost any kind of abusive incidents could have occurred.

7.225 Mr Crowley's views and conclusions are not part of the investigation process undertaken by the Committee. The apology issued by the Sisters of Mercy following the 'Dear Daughter' programme was issued because Mr Crowley had advised in the way that he did. His report and his conclusions are, therefore, a part of the background to the investigation and to the positions taken by the Sisters of Mercy at different stages. However, the statements made by Sr Venetia and Sr Alida to Mr Crowley are different from the rest of the report because they have direct relevance to the investigation. They are records of the recollections and responses of persons who participated in the running of the Institution over a period of 30 years, and one of whom is now deceased.

7.226 Mr Crowley completed his report in February 1996 and he stated that it was evident that a comprehensive inquiry by a multi-disciplinary team would be necessary which would be dependent on cooperation from both former residents and staff. The Sisters of Mercy explain in their Opening Statement that such an inquiry was impossible, as at that stage legal proceedings had been instituted by a number of former residents.

7.227 The Congregation have asked the Investigation Committee to note the limitations of the Crowley report, which they identify as being four-fold:

- (1) The report was based on interviews with a small number of complainants; with Srs Alida and Venetia; and with Louis Lentin (producer of 'Dear Daughter').
- (2) There was little, if any, questioning of the complainants on the details of complaints.
- (3) There are no notes, transcripts or tapes of the interviews and there is therefore some difficulty in assessing precisely what was said. 'For example, Sr Alida explained to the Committee that **she had always had problems with the account in the report of what she had said**' (emphasis added). [This is factually incorrect. Sr Alida did not allege that she was misquoted by Mr Crowley but did make a comment about the report as a whole:

I have to say that.....from the very beginning I was quite unhappy with Mr Crowley's report.]

Sr Venetia never had an opportunity to give evidence to the Investigation Committee either in general or specifically in relation to the Crowley Report.

- (4) The information-gathering exercise was conducted very quickly and the conclusions were intended to be preliminary in nature. The exercise was intended to be a first step in a process, rather than a final conclusion.

7.228 The Sisters of Mercy note that the issues which were the subject matter of the Crowley Report are precisely those which fall within the Commission's remit and given the substantial bank of both oral and documentary material which the Investigation Committee has at its disposal they submit that it would be inappropriate for the Investigation Committee to place excessive reliance on the earlier preliminary report.

7.229 Sr Alida has never challenged the accuracy of the statements attributed to her in the report. Had she done so, it would have been necessary for her to give evidence to the Committee. However, because the accuracy of Mr Crowley's recording of statements was not an issue, such evidence did not become necessary.

7.230 The nature and circumstances of the Crowley report must be taken into account. The description of Sr Bianca given by both Sr Venetia and Sr Alida is consistent with accounts given by former residents and with the atmosphere described as pervading the institution during her time as resident manager. The comments quoted by Mr Crowley are also relevant to subsequent conditions about which the sisters spoke to him and tend to corroborate much of the oral testimony.

7.231 Mr Crowley placed much of the blame for the conditions that pertained in Goldenbridge on ignorance, insensitivity and a failure to communicate. In this regard, it is interesting to look at the lecture entitled 'Institutional Management' which was delivered by Sr Bianca in February 1953. This lecture indicates awareness of the special requirements of institutionalised children. The preparation for this lecture was done in consultation with Dr Anna McCabe, who in her Visitation Report of 1953 referred to regular meetings with Sr Bianca to discuss this lecture.

Conclusions on physical abuse

- 7.232**
- 1. Overall, there was a high level of severe corporal punishment in Goldenbridge, resulting in a pervasive climate of fear in the Institution.**
 - 2. Beatings on the landing were a particularly cruel feature of the regime.**
 - 3. A parallel, unofficial system of punishment permitted every member of staff to use corporal punishment, which was often excessive. Some former residents, who were unsuited for outside employment, were retained as helpers and often administered severe punishment.**
 - 4. Children were beaten and humiliated for bed-wetting by both nuns and lay staff.**
 - 5. There is no evidence that a punishment book was kept in Goldenbridge, as was required by the regulations, and the absence of this important record should have been noticed and reported by the Department Inspector.**

Rosary bead making

7.233 A particular feature of Goldenbridge was rosary bead making. Sometime in the mid-1940s, Sr Alida was approached by a businessman with the proposition that she might get the children to make rosary beads in return for payment. She saw this as a wonderful opportunity to acquire much-needed funds. In addition, she thought that it would keep the children occupied. So began an enterprise that was to continue until the 1960s.

7.234 After school, at about 3.30pm, the children had something to eat and then went to the beads class. The location was Ms Dempsey's classroom. The children were required to make decades of the rosary by putting the beads on lengths of wire. After each bead was positioned, the wire had to be looped and cut using pliers, and each bead then had to be attached to the next bead until all 10 beads were completed.

- 7.235** The children each had a quota of 60 decades per day and 90 on a Saturday. This meant that, in the two hours of the weekday afternoon allocated for this work, 30 decades an hour had to be made by each child. Not surprisingly, few children reached their quota in the afternoon, and they had to return to the beads class in the evening and remain there until their 60 decades were completed.
- 7.236** There is some controversy over the age at which children began to make beads, but it appears that, after they made their First Holy Communion, that is around seven years of age, children were expected to do this work. There were younger children in the room, who helped by picking up beads or by stringing the beads to leave them ready for the older girls to make the decade.
- 7.237** Skill and dexterity were required. It would have taken some time to develop expertise. It was also painful, and witnesses described cuts and calluses on their hands as they tried to learn the work. A child starting would be slow at first, and might never acquire the necessary skill to be able to do it quickly.
- 7.238** Sometimes, an older girl would help out a younger who was having difficulty in reaching the quota. Similarly, friends might help each other. In this way, the great majority of the children between seven and 16 years were occupied every day from Monday to Friday. For a variety of reasons, some children would not have to do beads, but the vast majority of children between the ages mentioned had to attend for this work. On Saturdays, the quota was 90 decades, and there were, of course, other chores (called charges) to be completed.
- 7.239** Sr Alida conceded that it was difficult work:
... it wasn't soft work to be working with the pliers, it was not like needle work, you had to use energy to bend the wire.
- 7.240** When Sr Alida first attempted to make a decade of beads that the representative from the bead making company had given her, she admitted it took her an entire Saturday to make one decade. She also conceded that she *'had so much hardship making them'*. But thereafter, she said, it was like knitting.
- 7.241** Different types of beads were used, and this made the task of stringing decades more difficult, depending on the type of bead. Horn beads and plastic beads posed no problem, but glass beads tended to break, and the mother of pearl beads were very difficult to string through.
- 7.242** Bead making was supervised by one of the care staff or, more likely, by one of the care assistants, and it was often Ms Thornton. A child who had the necessary skill could complete her quota by teatime but not much before that. Others found difficulty in completing their assigned task. The work was inspected by the person in charge and sent back to be redone if it was not found satisfactory for one reason or another. Some beads were easier to work with than others, even for people who were good at the work. If the quota was not reached, the child was in trouble. It might happen that, even after going back to beads work after tea and staying there until perhaps 9pm or 9.30pm (some witnesses said even later), the quota would still not be achieved. In those circumstances, the evidence was that the child would be punished by being beaten. If the work was found unsatisfactory, the result was punishment at the hands of the person in charge of the beads room.
- 7.243** It happened occasionally, when a dispatch was due to go to the factory, that some of the children had to stay as late as 10pm to complete an order and ensure that it met the required standard.
- 7.244** In the Opening Statement delivered by Sr Helena O'Donoghue, the bead making work was characterised as a pleasant activity to while away the time, which was enjoyed by the children

and often done to music from the radio. A picture was painted of a busy workroom, where happy children chatted as they carried out this routine work. It is apparent that this description is based on information from Sr Alida.

7.245 This description of bead making by Sr Helena was inaccurate. The work was hard. The hours were long. While some girls were well capable of doing the work once they had got used to it, for many others it was difficult to master the dexterity required. There was pressure to achieve the quota and to keep to the required standard of work. The work could fail in a variety of ways, including obvious ones like not having the right number of beads in a decade. Less obvious and more difficult to avoid were errors such as having inconsistent-sized loops of wire joining the beads. The atmosphere was not the pleasant group activity imagined by Sr Helena and remembered by Sr Alida. The essential requirement was of quietly, if not silently, getting on with the work; the children did converse but mostly in whispers, and the radio was turned on only occasionally while this work was being done.

7.246 The fact that punishment hung over the activity, for failure to achieve either quality or quantity, inevitably affected the atmosphere. The work was relentless, with demanding quotas. This was hard work over long hours during six days a week, for children obliged to do the work with no reference to their capacity to manage it.

7.247 Sr Venetia in her interview with Mr Crowley confirmed that:

the bead making and that failure to obey rules were normally punishable by physical beatings.

7.248 The money made from bead making was considerable. Sr Alida gave evidence of being able to produce £1,000 to contribute to the sum of £3,000 in the 1950s for the purchase of the holiday house at Rathdrum. The best estimates as to the earnings are that an income of approximately £50 per week was achieved by this activity.

7.249 Management saw this work as a practical and useful occupation that kept the girls out of trouble during many hours of the week, when they would otherwise have needed amusement or diversion or other occupation. Instead, it conditioned them to drudgery, with the added threat of being beaten for failure.

7.250 The authorities lost all sense of importance about bead making. It became a relentless production line. Sr Alida's enthusiasm became obsession. Occupation became drudgery. The pursuit of extra money by way of profit from the bead making became exploitation. All this was carried out under the threat of being beaten for failure.

Evidence of complainants

7.251 Over half of the complainants who testified spoke of the hardship associated with stringing decades of beads. From their evidence, it was an activity they clearly did not enjoy and, instead, viewed it as a chore. The daily quota system of each child having to make 60 decades each evening was, according to many of the witnesses, a source of stress and pressure. They said that assembling the beads into decades was hard work, which resulted in calluses, welts and cuts on their hands from the use of the pliers and the steel wire.

7.252 Some of the complainants recalled that they commenced this activity at the age of seven, after their First Communion. Initially, they were involved in stringing the beads on a wire for the older girls, before progressing to making the decades. One witness recounted her introduction to bead making as follows:

The beads class was something that you were introduced to after Communion. In the early stages the younger children would be asked to pick the beads up off the floor or maybe wire, anything that had fallen. You would also be asked to string beads for the older girls. This allowed them to move quickly to reach their quota, which was 60 decades per evening.

7.253 Some witnesses spoke of the difficulty in reaching their daily quota and being punished for not attaining it. The punishment could take the form of a slap there and then, by whoever was supervising the class, or sometimes they would be sent to the landing to await their punishment. Ms Thornton and Ms O'Shea at different times took charge of supervising the class, and both were considered to be violent individuals. A witness described it as follows:

... you had little pliers and wire and the wire was constantly digging into your skin and you just couldn't work fast enough to reach the quota every day. We were lined up every night, those who hadn't reached the quota and beaten.

7.254 This witness was regularly punished for not reaching her quota, and eventually, when the pressure became too much for her, on one occasion, she resorted to stealing another girl's beads to avoid another beating. The other girl was punished instead of her. She said:

... I had been beaten every night for not making enough ... On one occasion ... I just couldn't stand it anymore so I stole a handful of beads from the girl across the aisle when she was out of the room. When the nun came round she said, "I did them, I did them, somebody stole them", the nun wouldn't believe her, took her to the front of the room and beat her. It has haunted me all my life ...

7.255 A common complaint referred to by many of the witnesses was the tense atmosphere of the beads room, which was generated by the pressure they were placed under to reach their daily quota. The tension resulted in the work being carried out in silence. A witness described the tense atmosphere as follows:

... There was always somebody ready to shout at you and come down and hit you ... you weren't really meant to talk to one another, you did of course, you whispered, but it was all the time you were sort of watching your back.

7.256 Again and again, the witnesses spoke of the silence in the room. One witness said:

We all sat down and made our rosary beads. We had a little box and we made our rosary beads. It was work. We weren't allowed to talk, we didn't talk. We only talked when she left the room. Whoever, was there in that room, when they left, we talked. When they came back we stopped. We had to work because we had a quota to do, we had so many to do.

7.257 Another witness said:

... there was a radio in it and PJ O'Connor used to tell a story once a week on a Wednesday. Most times the radio wasn't on and you had to do it in silence.

7.258 Two of the witnesses, who came forward at the request of the Sisters of Mercy to give evidence of their time in Goldenbridge, also spoke of the silence and tension in the room. One such witness said:

The beads class, I don't know why I always felt everything was sort of so quiet. I don't remember really much chat in the beads class. We probably whispered to one another but I don't remember conversations with anybody ... I think we were too busy, I took all my time to make them anyway, we were so busy making them so I wouldn't have had that much time to do anything.

7.259 The second positive witness said that she could get into trouble for talking loudly in beads class but she could talk to the person beside her as long as it was done quietly.

Evidence of respondents

7.260 Sr Alida described the beads room as ‘*a room of relaxation rather than pressure*’. She said that there was a radio or record player that was played in the room, and the children sang along and chatted amongst themselves. She did not consider the work difficult, and stated that ‘*it didn’t take a lot of stress doing the work*’ and she felt that the work was comparable to a knitting class.

7.261 Sr Alida denied that children were beaten for not reaching their quota and claimed ‘*that there was no difficulty in making the quota in the beads class*’. She admitted that it was her responsibility to check the quality and quantity of the decades of beads before they were returned to the factory. If the beads were not properly completed, they would be sent back and ‘*it was nasty, to get them back to be repaired, very nasty*’. This, she said, resulted in her staying up ‘*odd nights*’ with children helping her to finish the work to go back to the factory.

7.262 Sr Alida began the beads class with the permission of the Resident Manager, Sr Bianca. She explained that it was important for the children to have something to do:

My chief problem was that the children had nothing in the world to do after they left school in the evening, there was no occupation of any kind. They went to the play hall and they shouted and roared and pulled each other around from 3.30 until 5.45, we were in the convent at that time.

7.263 Sr Alida also viewed the bead making as a means of generating extra income for the School. At the time when she was approached to assemble decades of rosaries, she said Goldenbridge ‘*was subject to considerable financial restraint*’, and she saw the bead making as an opportunity to increase their financial income:

... I viewed this offer as an opportunity to increase the income of the home for the benefit of the children. I believed that this could provide us with a source of income to improve the welfare of the children and to provide them with little luxuries which were not available to us at that time.

7.264 Sr Alida said that the money from the beads was used to pay for Irish dancing classes, old-time dancing, dancing shoes and costumes for the children, sweets, yearly trips to Butlins, and day trips to Portmarnock during the summer. She also said that the children were given pocket money out of the proceeds of the bead money. These were the ‘*luxuries*’ that were provided by the beads money, and ‘*everything that the children had as extras*’ came from that money.

7.265 The bead making became a very profitable enterprise, generating a weekly income of at least £50 for the School. Sr Alida opened a Post Office savings account for the proceeds from the bead making, which she controlled, and Sr Bianca never queried what she did with it. The money made from the beads over a 20-year period was considerable. Sr Alida asserted that the money earned was spent on the children:

... All those things did not come from the allowance the Government paid for the children, it came from the children’s own hands ... the beads bought those things for them.

7.266 The money from the beads provided one-third of the cost of the purchase of a holiday home for the children in Rathdrum in 1954. The entire cost of the holiday home was £3,000. The Investigation Committee instructed Mazars, Financial Consultants to review the accounts of Goldenbridge. They confirmed the figure of at least £50 per week.

7.267 Prior to introducing bead making, Sr Alida had a knitting class where girls made their own jumpers. This work was superseded by bead making, although a very small number of bigger girls continued to do knitting.

7.268 Sr Gianna recalled that Ms Thornton, a former resident of the Institution, often supervised the beads class. Although she was of the view that Ms Thornton was kind to the children, she conceded that she had a bad temper and that she heard her shouting and roaring at the children in the class.

7.269 Ms Garvin remembered Ms O'Shea, another lay worker and former resident, supervising the beads class. During her time in Goldenbridge from the early 1960s to the mid-1970s, she went to the beads class most days before teatime, where she remembered seeing the girls chatting to each other and that music was playing. She insisted that the atmosphere in the beads room was pleasant, and she never saw a child being beaten in the beads room. There was, however, evidence that Ms O'Shea was violent and irascible.

The Congregation's position

7.270 In contrast to the reminiscence of some of the Sisters that the bead making was a pleasurable activity, the Congregation recognised that learning the skill of bead making:

... could have caused fingers to be tender or skin broken initially, and trying to finish a "quota" must at times also have put unfair pressure on some children. We recognise that this activity is remembered with particular bitterness by some former residents and we deeply regret that something which was intended to be helpful was experienced as harmful and unhappy.

7.271 In its written Submissions, it accepted that it was not an enjoyable activity, as there was a lot of pressure to get the work done:

For those who were engaged in the process, the activity was undoubtedly experienced as a compulsory activity which was not enjoyable and had to be, at best, endured. While there was the radio to listen to, talking was muted and the main aim was to get one's work done. There was clearly a pressure to get the work done; work was on occasion rejected as falling short of standards and there was a requirement to complete a quota.

7.272 The Congregation stated that the purpose of bead making was twofold: firstly, to provide useful occupation for the children after school; and, secondly, to provide extra funds for 'pocket money, recreational activities and equipment for the children'. But they recognised that 'there was too much emphasis on occupation as a means of management and control of the children'.

Conclusions on bead making

- 7.273**
- 1. Bead making became an industrial activity that was pursued obsessively; the work was difficult and uncomfortable and it was painful for children especially those who lacked dexterity and speed.**
 - 2. The quota system made the work onerous and pressurised and a source of stress and anxiety.**
 - 3. Supervision by lay workers or nuns to ensure quantity and quality on pain of punishment created work conditions that would not have been tolerated in factories.**
 - 4. Using the children for this work deprived them of normal childhood recreation that was necessary for emotional, social and psychological development.**

Sexual abuse

Allegations against a caretaker and others in the School

- 7.274** There is only one documented case of a child having been sexually abused in Goldenbridge. The incident occurred in 1962, when a caretaker in the School was convicted of indecently assaulting a girl.
- 7.275** The girl who had been sexually assaulted by the caretaker reported the matter to Sr Alida, who immediately informed the Gardaí. The caretaker was dismissed from his employment and was subsequently prosecuted and convicted. He received a three-month suspended sentence.
- 7.276** The Sisters of Mercy confirmed that ‘the only definite knowledge’ they had regarding sexual abuse in Goldenbridge related to the 1962 incident.
- 7.277** However, the Investigation Committee heard other complaints against this man. One complainant alleged that she had been raped by him. She alleged that the rape had taken place around 1960, when she was 11 years old, and two years before he was reported to the Gardaí. She said she did not report this incident to anyone in Goldenbridge, as she was afraid of being sent to a reformatory. The alleged incident occurred in a room off a dormitory where he was fixing a sash window and she was sent to assist him.
- 7.278** One witness, who did not herself allege abuse by the caretaker, said of him:
It was common knowledge that Mr Hurley²⁰ was at children in the laundry.
- 7.279** A small number of other complaints related to sexual interference by older girls on younger girls and by persons to whose care the children were entrusted at weekends.

Allegations against foster families

- 7.280** One witness spoke of being abused by a member of a family to whom she was sent out to at the weekend. This family, she felt, was not vetted. She says she was *‘fondled by an outsider’*.
- 7.281** Another witness also spoke of being abused by a man in a family she was sent out to for a weekend. She did not want to go to this family again and, when she tried to explain to the nun in charge, she *‘boxed the face off her’*.
- 7.282** Another witness said she was abused by an uncle of a family she was sent to. She alleged that this occurred in the garden of the family’s home. She also referred to an incident of attempted rape by the son of another family she was sent out to in Dublin. She was left alone in the house with him, and he came into her bedroom and threw her on the bed and attempted to rape her.

Allegations of sexual abuse on young boys

- 7.283** A witness alleged that he was abused by a lay person who slept in the dormitory with the children. He stated:
I was made to play with her for what seemed to go on for some time and whilst doing this I was in fear of the nuns catching me and if I was caught being out of bed I would get the strap or I would get a slapping or a beating. This went on for some time.
- 7.284** He went on to describe that the nature of the play was sexual.

²⁰ This is a pseudonym.

7.285 He felt that he could not tell anyone about what was happening to him.

7.286 A complainant who spent a few months in Goldenbridge in the late 1960s said that older girls had sexually abused him when he was aged eight. He recalled being brought into a room with a bed in it, and there were three women or older girls in the room. He was not certain whether they were older girls or women who worked in the School:

I was put sitting on the edge of the bed and the covers were pulled down and one of the girls was exposed. I was told to feel her private parts, then I was told to feel another one of the women or girl's private parts. My memory is this happened on more than one occasion.

Conclusions on sexual abuse

- 7.287**
- 1. Sexual abuse was not a significant issue in the investigation of Goldenbridge, but there was an incident in 1962 which was dealt with promptly.**
 - 2. Management did not consider the risk of sexual abuse when sending children to foster families.**

Emotional abuse

7.288 It is instructive to look at the topic of emotional abuse, using a contemporary source outlining the informed opinion at the time. In 1953, Sr Bianca, the Resident Manager of Goldenbridge, delivered a lecture to a conference on childcare management run by the Archbishop of Dublin. She was regarded as somewhat of an expert, having at that stage managed Goldenbridge Industrial School for 11 years. Sr Bianca collaborated with the Department of Education's Medical Inspector, Dr McCabe, in preparing for the lecture. Her lecture indicated an enlightened and progressive approach to institutional management, in particular she made the following points:

- (a) Children from underprivileged backgrounds should be met with sympathy and gentleness.
- (b) Drastic remedies for head lice such as shaving children's heads should not be necessary particularly when there were remedies on the market at a very reasonable price.
- (c) Children should be divided into small groups, including at meal times, to promote an intimate family atmosphere. 'Formal marshalling and regimentation must be avoided'.
- (d) Whilst there should be an emphasis on domestic training there was no reason why girls should not follow a commercial or other career path if they had the necessary talent.
- (e) Every child should help with small jobs and chores about the home. They should be encouraged to be creative and arts and crafts teachers employed.
- (f) Dressing the children uniformly should be discouraged.
- (g) Children should be allowed a considerable amount of supervised freedom. They should be allowed to go to the local shop and older girls permitted to go into town on the bus to run errands.
- (h) A large playground and hall was a necessity. A field for sports should be made available. Senior girls should have their own sitting room. Music should be encouraged, both playing instruments and singing as well as listening to music on the radio. Dancing should also be encouraged. Caring for pets was another useful occupation for children.

- (i) The Manager should possess skill and judgement 'have a strong personality without being overbearing and dictatorial ... and strictly impartial'. Those charged with the care of such children should have a keen interest in their work and possess the requisite experience and knowledge of psychology.

7.289 The Sisters of Mercy noted in their Opening Statement that this lecture 'tells us much of the thinking and practice at Goldenbridge'.

7.290 The Investigation Committee heard complaints regarding emotional abuse in the evidence from complainants. All of the complainants came to Goldenbridge in harrowing circumstances. Some had lost a parent, and the surviving parent was either not able to cope or was deemed by the State to be unsuitable. Others were abandoned. Some came from desperately poor families, and others were born out of wedlock to mothers who felt that society left them with no option but to place their child in care. Some of those committed were babies; others had spent a substantial part of their childhood with their families. Most of the children were heartbroken and terrified on entering Goldenbridge. They all shared a vulnerability that made them emotionally needy.

7.291 Complainants lived in an atmosphere of constant fear of arbitrary punishment for misdemeanours and of being humiliated. Despite always being surrounded by people, many expressed an overwhelming sense of isolation and loneliness. Many of the complainants stated that they are left with deep psychological scars as a result of their time in Goldenbridge.

7.292 Witnesses' account of their experiences in Goldenbridge indicate a very high level of emotional abuse in that Institution.

7.293 One witness spoke of arriving at Goldenbridge as a six-year-old child in the late 1940s after her mother had died of TB. She described the experience as 'very very harrowing': she said she was stripped of her clothes and that all her hair was cropped.

7.294 When asked whether she had understood at the time why her clothes were being taken from her, she replied:

No. You weren't told. You were just used and abused ... you were disposable ... They didn't give a stuff about what you were, whether you were a child, whether you were breathing, whether you were living, what you were feeling. Nobody bothered about a child. You were just a disposable item. That's the way it seemed to me. That's the way I have carried all through my life. I don't like what I have carried all through my life. It has left me vulnerable, raw and it has affected the whole of my life.

7.295 She said:

I used to scurry around. I used to try to dodge and weave to get away from the beatings, the abuse. You didn't. You were helpless. Wherever you were you were a helpless victim. You couldn't get away from them. They used to clatter you, they used to batter you. The names you were called. The stuff you had to go through. The thing was you were always so alone. There was never anybody there for you. Nobody was there this is what I find so hard to tell you. You were lumped together and you were one of a many, many ...

7.296 When asked to describe what she was fearful of in Goldenbridge she said, 'what they would do to you. You knew that you could never get away from their cruelty. You couldn't escape and take yourself off'.

7.297 She said she used to lie in her bed at night and wished that she didn't wake up in the morning. She said that she would sob her heart out crying for her mother.

7.298 Another complainant was eight years of age when she was put into Goldenbridge with her younger sister in the early 1950s. She said that her mother and father had separated and that her father had abandoned the family. She was living with her grandmother when, she believes, the NSPCC made an application to court to have both her and her younger sister committed to Goldenbridge. She said:

We weren't prepared in any way, we weren't told – we thought it was an outing which was very rare anyway for us ... the next thing we knew my mother and my grandmother were leaving, they were leaving. We didn't know what was going to happen to us. Of course we were screaming trying to get out through the door with them and the nun just pulled us back.

7.299 This complainant said that her grandmother used to come on Wednesday afternoons to visit her. Visiting day was Saturday, and her grandmother was not allowed into the School. She said that one of the nuns would come to her and say, *'Go down to the gate, your grandmother is there'*.

7.300 She said that she went to a remand home in England after she had left Goldenbridge and that the environment there was completely different. She said that the convent was run by a French Order, and their whole attitude towards the children was that they had some value. They were not sadistic in any way and, although the regime there was strict by today's standard, you were punished for actually doing something wrong. She said that the children were also allowed to play, even though they had chores to do and laundry duties; nevertheless, there was no forced labour: *'We actually liked the nuns there'*.

7.301 When asked to elaborate on the contrast between the English home and Goldenbridge, this complainant said, *'the stark contrast was that we were allowed to be children, we didn't feel that we were despised'*. She said that the living conditions and the food were better and that, although corporal punishment was used and administered with a cane, she could count on the fingers on one hand the times it happened to her.

7.302 One complainant was born to an unmarried mother and lived with her grandmother in Dublin. She said she recalls getting dressed up nicely one day and being brought to a big building from which she was put into a van or a car and taken away screaming to Goldenbridge. She said that her main contact when she went in to Goldenbridge was with her grandmother, who came up every second Sunday or every Sunday to visit her: *'All I remember was crying, sometimes I was happy to see her and other times I wasn't because it made me fret, want to go home. Why was I being left here?'*

7.303 Another complainant, who spent 15 years in Goldenbridge from the mid-1950s, said that she was very affected by being called ugly by the nuns and staff while she was there. She said that she used to keep her head down all the time because she believed that she was so ugly. She spoke of a lack of confidence and very low self-esteem that has dogged her all her life. It had caused problems in her relationships with people over the years. In particular, she said it had impacted on the way she looked after her own children. She treated them the way she had been treated. She has since apologised to her family. She said she now knew that you must always show children love, *'Lift a child up, give the child love, reassure her that she is so pretty or that he is so pretty. It means so much in life, showing an individual love'*.

7.304 This complainant was born to an unmarried mother and had little or no contact with her family throughout her life. She found it very difficult to cope with the outside world after leaving Goldenbridge and felt ill-equipped and ill-prepared.

7.305 Her dislike of the Institution and her sense of unease at her treatment there were clear from a letter she wrote in 1967 to Sr Venetia. In that letter she said, referring to the suggestion that she should return to Goldenbridge because she got into trouble in England:

You know what kind of trouble I got into, I believe you wanted to have me back, but I refused to go because I know what I would have to face. I have faced enough with you all there, and you know that I did not like it there. Every time I went out you took a bad impression. Well, Sister, the mothers here try to do all they can to help me, especially the Mother in charge. She cannot help me anymore and I do appreciate all she did. Also, we call them mothers because they treat us as if they were our mothers.

7.306 This is quite a significant letter. It was written by this complainant to the one person who had been a mother substitute to her for her entire childhood. It is a sad reflection on the relationship she had with her carers in Goldenbridge. This letter was not the result of any media campaign, or any contamination: it is a contemporaneous document written by a very young girl who had just left the Institution.

7.307 Another witness, who entered Goldenbridge as a small baby and spent 13 years there in the 1950s and 1960s, said that her great problem was fear, even after she left Goldenbridge. She said she always felt very lonely and that she couldn't really mix and was bullied a lot.

7.308 One complainant, who was committed to Goldenbridge at one year old in the early 1950s and remained there for 15 years, said:

None of us got loved, none of us. When I look back I wonder how I grew up at all. It was the most strangest place for a child to be reared. The nuns were cruel but they didn't know half of it because they use to be up saying their prayers. The people they had looking after us was horrible people.

7.309 This complainant noticed an improvement in Goldenbridge towards the end of her time there in the 1960s.

7.310 Another witness was five years of age when she was admitted into Goldenbridge in the mid-1950s. Her mother developed post-natal depression after the eighth child in the family was born and was admitted to St Brendan's Hospital. She specifically mentioned emotional abuse as being the biggest hurt that she experienced in Goldenbridge.

7.311 She spoke of name-calling and jeering, and said that it came from staff members and carers who were past pupils who had been kept on as part of the staff. She said it was very, very abusive, and the comments centred on the fact that her mother had had a mental breakdown and was in a psychiatric hospital. She said that the one person who stood out the most for referring to it a great deal was Sr Venetia. She spoke of practices in Goldenbridge, such as underwear inspections and a lack of any preparation for menstruation, as contributing to the lack of confidence that all the girls experienced.

7.312 She said that the effect of their institutionalisation had devastated her family. Her three sisters all suffered from serious psychological problems. She was particularly traumatised by the memory of her younger sister, who she claimed was physically abused in Goldenbridge.

7.313 Another witness spent nine years in Goldenbridge from the mid-1950s in similar circumstances to the previous complainant. Her mother was placed in a mental institution following a breakdown.

7.314 She said that one of the hardest things about being institutionalised at seven years of age was the sense of isolation. She spoke about being jeered at by Sr Venetia and by workers because of

the fact that her mother was in a mental institution. She said that they were all called 'mad', especially by Sr Venetia. This had a very deep psychological impact on her.

- 7.315** Another witness spoke of the great sadness caused by her mother's mental breakdown that resulted in the family having to be placed in care. She gave a poignant description of her relationship with her father throughout her time in Goldenbridge. Her father was a timid man who held the nuns who ran the School in great esteem. She said that he constantly hoped that he would be able to take all his children out so that they could be home together. However, she said that she knew intuitively that this would not happen. She also said that she never asked about her mother. She knew that it affected her father to speak about her, and therefore she never mentioned her. She said that he was very uncomfortable and that she felt like his protector. This child developed an extremely severe respiratory condition, which she claims was not properly medicated by the staff in Goldenbridge.
- 7.316** She described the atmosphere in Goldenbridge as being grey and barren, and said that she had no possessions of her own when she was there. However, she did not tell her father what was going on in Goldenbridge or that they were being bullied, because he was like a co-dependant. She also protected her younger sister who was a bed-wetter, and used to try and replace her sheet early in the morning before the wet sheet was discovered. She was aware, even while she was in Goldenbridge, that the fact that her father visited her was very important, and she was terrified that anything would happen to him.
- 7.317** This complainant has lived in England for a long number of years and said that nobody knows about Goldenbridge, because she has never spoken about it, even to friends that she has known for 25 years. She said that she constantly feels 'no good'. She said that the journey that she has had to follow to put herself together, and not have a sense of being a marked person in an orphanage with the stigma and abuse, has been a very long one. It has cost her a lot emotionally, physically and mentally. She felt sorry about her father. He may have known what the children were suffering in Goldenbridge, but could do nothing about it. She said that, if it had been her, she would have been challenging the nuns, but her father was intimidated by them and could not question what was going on. She asked why would a man, who was basically a good man, feel so intimidated in dealing with the nuns in Goldenbridge who were caring for his children.
- 7.318** Another complainant spoke about the contrast between Goldenbridge and a care home in England. She left Goldenbridge at 13, and went to live with her mother in England. Her mother was quite abusive and the complainant ran away from home. She ended up in a children's home in England. She said at first she had thought she had gone back to Goldenbridge again, but she found it a lovely place with lovely people. She said she tasted food that she had never tasted and she remembers how the tables were set. Sometimes she 'played up' there, and she would not be given pocket money if she did that, and the people in charge would bring her into the sitting room and talk to her. She said that they were lovely and that she has great admiration for all of them.
- 7.319** She recalled that there were sitting rooms in the care home in England. Whereas in Goldenbridge there were no comfortable chairs or sofas, only wooden chairs and tables.
- 7.320** She said that the nuns were really not involved in the day-to-day activity in Goldenbridge. When she was there, it was run principally by the lay staff and older girls. She recalled Sr Venetia, who would have been the only nun who did have contact with the Institution, but the other nuns were only seen in church:

They used to come down now and again around Christmas to watch a film ... which was the only time you ever saw Venetia laugh. They never acknowledged you. They were there at that side, here we were at this side. You might as well have put a bar – there

was no way they were ever going to talk to you. Even in the church, there were all these so called holy people, they never acknowledged you.

7.321 A witness who was in Goldenbridge for nine years in the 1960s described her time there:

I mean the first sentence that always comes to me is that it was a reign of terror, it was a terrifying place for any child to be. Speaking for myself I found it utterly terrifying, it was vicious, it was so full of fear, it was so full of tension. It was indescribably terrifying.

7.322 When she left, she described how she felt:

If I start at the beginning, I was completely and utterly depressed, completely unfit to function in the world outside. Within months of leaving Goldenbridge I was in a psychiatric hospital ... I have lived through some of the darkest, darkest, blackest, blackest depressions imaginable. I have lived with shame, absolute abject shame. I felt like a nobody, worthless, a nuisance, a waste of space on the planet, utterly. I hated every adult who walked the planet ... I was bitter, I was angry. I was broken. I tried to be happy if that makes sense, I really did try. I tried to be normal, but you couldn't be. People would say to you, "Where are you from? I would say, "did I ask you where you came from". I would say, "No, Mind your own business, don't ask me".

7.323 She said she found this question so difficult to deal with that she often lied.

7.324 She found filling in application forms, which required parents' names and occupations and where she was from, to be deeply upsetting and shaming for her.

7.325 She said that, although Sr Venetia wasn't anything as bad as Sr Alida, she was very capable of battering children and, in particular, she was verbally very cruel to children:

She was very good at calling you names, and Sr Venetia was capable of being very cruel to particular children ... She was very good at humiliation, Ill tell you that, she was very good at that.

7.326 She spoke of particular girls who suffered humiliation at the hands of Sr Venetia. One particular girl suffered from perspiration, and Sr Venetia used make her strip off to her underclothes every day and wash in front of all her peers. She said that Sr Venetia had particular girls whom she treated as favourites, and they were never beaten and got special treatment from her.

7.327 Many witnesses complained of the name-calling that they endured during their time in Goldenbridge. They spoke of being called '*worse than the soldiers who crucified Christ*', or being called '*filthy*' and '*dirty*'. Other witnesses referred to verbal insults of being called '*fat and ugly*', being called '*crackpot and mad*'. Other witnesses made reference to the hurt caused by the name-calling and the degradation that accompanied it.

7.328 For a number of complainants, one of the most difficult memories was the treatment they recalled their siblings receiving while in Goldenbridge. These witnesses suffered greatly, where those siblings went on to have serious psychiatric problems or even where they had subsequently died. They felt that, in some way, they might have been able to help the sibling had they spoken to them more openly about their experiences in Goldenbridge.

7.329 One witness, who spent seven years in Goldenbridge after the death of her mother, described trying to protect her younger brothers in Goldenbridge. They were bed-wetters, and she was very upset when they were punished for wetting the bed. She couldn't bear to see them slapped, because she knew that they couldn't help doing it. Even though she was just a child herself, she could see that beating children for wetting the bed was cruel and unfair.

- 7.330** She visited her younger brothers in another industrial school because she believed that, if the authorities knew that somebody from outside the Institution was watching, it would be easier on the boys there. This was an impression she got from Goldenbridge, where she felt that anybody who had a parent or relative in touch with the School got an easier time. She visited her younger brothers in the Industrial School until she was 18. At that stage, her father had returned. Eventually, the family were all reunited and, to this day, are very close.
- 7.331** She was nearly 10 years of age when she went into Goldenbridge and she had a clear memory of life before the Institution. She felt that it gave her a bit of a foundation and that she was luckier than children who had no mothers or fathers. She used to fantasise about a real home, and used to tell stories about things that happened on the outside. One of her brothers spoke to the Investigation Committee and confirmed that his sister did protect both him and his other brothers and sisters while they were in Goldenbridge.
- 7.332** Another witness, who had a good experience of family life before being admitted to Goldenbridge at the age of nine following the death of her mother, said that her overall impression of the Institution was of horror and fear. Her father died in 1967, but whilst he was alive he had regular contact with the family. He visited every second Sunday, but he would often arrive after he had been drinking. She recalled how Sr Eleonora²¹ and one of the lay staff would speak to him in a degrading way. His children would plead and beg him to take them out of Goldenbridge, and his famous saying was *'keep your chin up ... it's not what's on the outside, it's the inside that counts'*. She said the family were very poor. Their mother was a lovely woman. She believed that the fact that their father visited them regularly spared her from a lot of the abuse that the other children were subjected to. One of her great dislikes in Goldenbridge was that some of the girls were treated as favourites and pets.
- 7.333** She spoke about being beaten and abused if underwear was dirty, and also spoke of the humiliation of being lined up naked to be painted with a treatment for scabies. She was quite clear that the way in which this treatment was carried out was designed to maximise the humiliation of the children, particularly of older girls.
- 7.334** Some of the witnesses at the Goldenbridge hearings were men who had been sent there as young boys. One man spoke of the loss of family contact as a result of being placed in Goldenbridge at two years of age in the early 1960s. He said:
- Goldenbridge was a tough place as a young little boy. When I think of my own kids and I think that if anybody hurt them I would destroy their lives. That is the only true way I have got of reflecting on what happened to me as a kid growing up.*
- 7.335** This complainant said that it was only when he had his own children that he realised how harsh his own upbringing had been. They received no individual care and were just herded around.
- 7.336** One witness gave a very personal account of a tragedy that occurred during her time in Goldenbridge. She was there for 10 years from the mid-1960s, following the break-up of her parents' marriage.
- 7.337** Within a year of her committal to Goldenbridge, her two older brothers died in an accident. She and two of her sisters were called down to Sr Venetia's office, where she found two of their uncles, together with a lay teacher. They were told about the deaths and they were given two bull's eye sweets each. They were then sent back to the recreation room. She said that:
- I was sent back down to the rest of the children. Nobody took me aside and put their arms around me in any shape or form, as God is my witness that is the truth, that is the truth.*

²¹ This is a pseudonym.

Nobody gave me any comfort other than the bit of comfort we tried to give each other as a family.

7.338 The pain of loss and separation was experienced not only by the children. For many parents, placing their children in care was an act of desperation.

7.339 Another complainant entered Goldenbridge in the mid-1960s, aged five years of age, with his older sister, following the separation of his mother and father. There were six children at the time, and only the eldest sister accompanied her mother to England after the separation. Initially, his father was trying to look after the remaining five children, but they eventually ended up in court and being committed to Goldenbridge. Originally, he was committed for a 10-year period, but his mother 'kidnapped' both him and his sister and brought them back to England. She came originally to bring them on a day out, but then went to collect his two older brothers who were in an industrial school and then travelled across to England with the four of them. The younger sister was left in another institution, because she was too young to be released on a day outing. His mother visited the youngest girl until she was old enough, by which time the courts released her and the family was reunited.

7.340 A letter which this complainant's mother wrote in the mid-1960s and sent to the Christian Brothers is relevant:

Dear Sir,

I would like to inform you that I have now taken my children [X and Y] from your care without your consent. I have also taken [A and B] from Goldenbridge convent. All four are now in England with me.

I have phoned [the] Artane School from England to say that I took the children with me. I could not phone Goldenbridge as I do not know their phone number, but I am letting them know by post.

Please don't blame me too much for what I have done in taking this advantage, but I could not see my children unhappy no longer. I have for one year done my best to try to get the children together but everything failed because I respected the law.

Now, I have taken it into my own hands and if I am sent to jail I shall do the same again when I come out.

The Justice said I could have my children when I get a home for them. He did not say I would have to have my husband's consent so I did what I could to get the home for them, but I would not consider asking my husband for a letter of consent.

If he wants them he can fight for them from me. But he won't as he has not been to see them only twice since they were committed ... 12 months ago.

Yours truly,

Evidence of respondents

7.341 Sr Alida was asked whether the children were shown love and affection. She stated that there was no doubt that the pre-school children were shown love and affection by her, by staff in charge of the nursery, and by an older girl who would be assigned to keep an eye on them. She argued that the children of school-going age were not showered with the same level of affection as would be the norm today:

Looking back still I would have to say that I never had a feeling that I had a roomful of 150 sad and frightened children. I couldn't say that from my heart. That doesn't mean that there could be children very sad unknown to me. I didn't know what was inside any child's heart or in their head. We knew nothing at all about most of the families. Any research we did, it didn't get us very far, their lives family wise was very bleak. I, at the time, wasn't

– didn't take into consideration what state they were in. As teenagers or as babies. Babies you could compensate, the babies we loved and we hugged and we gave every kind of care to babies. They got the best. Any baby that came to our care, I can only say they got the best. When it came to children from 12 years upwards, I never knew what was inside their hearts or their minds.

7.342 Sr Gianna stated that she was very aware of the lack of emotional care for the children in Goldenbridge:

I would be very conscious of that when children came in from a family that had just lost a mother and how sad they would be. I would be very moved when I would see that because it was awful for them to come into this big school with this big crowd of children and to be just one of a group after being in a family setting.

7.343 She explained:

You would be very conscious of 150 children not having the hug and the love and the care of someone who really loved them closely. You would be very conscious of that. You wouldn't witness any of that. In our time you didn't do that, you didn't come near or hug people. That would have been part of our training as well. In hindsight, I think it was a good thing because I might have been accused of something very different if I had hugged or loved, as you might want to do.

7.344 She stated that Sr Alida was also aware of how vulnerable these children were. She recalled one little boy who had lost his mother and was committed to Goldenbridge. Sr Alida asked her to keep an eye on him as she worked in the workroom:

I remember him coming up, standing beside me, I was at the machine working, and I just remember him standing there and his little hand coming into mine every so often because he was so shy and sad.

7.345 Ms Kearney worked as a teacher in Goldenbridge for over 30 years. When she was asked about the atmosphere in Goldenbridge. She responded:

Not a happy place, I was glad to get out of it. When you have the children sulking, shouting at each other across the room and shouting at you and calling you all kinds of names it's very hard to put up with it. It wasn't a happy atmosphere, no. There were some lovely children in it, that never gave you a bit of trouble, you felt like hugging them but you didn't, you couldn't, because the bold ones would take it out of them, "teacher's pet".

Position of the Sisters of Mercy

7.346 The Sisters of Mercy accept that institutional life in Goldenbridge had many negative features, which they listed as follows:

- The large size of the institution and the number of children who lived there gave little prospect of a replication of a family's love and nurture.
- The low ratio of staff to children, which for most of the period under review was approximately 1 staff member for every 30 children.
- The absence of childcare training for Sisters and lay staff.
- The capitation system of funding, together with the level of funding, led to difficult financial constraints and choices.
- The regimental nature of institutional life where restriction on freedom of movement operated well beyond school hours and a lack of privacy, particularly in the early years.
- The emphasis on conformity rather than on creativity and choice.

- The very limited opportunities for forming personal one to one adult/child relationships.
- A reliance on corporal punishment as a feature in the maintenance of discipline and good order.
- A failure to properly understand the level of trauma suffered by each child as a result of being separated from family, sometimes in circumstances where their placement in the institution followed the death of a parent.
- A failure to properly respond to the individual emotional needs of the children, including how lonely and frightened they must have been in being taken from family and placed in a large institution with children of all ages.
- A failure to recognise the special emotional and educational needs of children who had come from troubled backgrounds.
- A failure to keep children informed about their family and family events, such as births marriages and deaths.
- A failure to assess the individual needs of each child, either on admission or on an ongoing basis.
- A failure to meet the comprehensive educational needs of children and the very inadequacy of the educational process itself relative to their needs.

7.347 In its written Submissions, the Congregation seemed to distance itself somewhat from culpability for the emotional deprivation experienced by so many complainants, and stated:

Allegations of emotional abuse are difficult to evaluate. Whether there was a general tendency to verbally denigrate and discourage the children is something almost as intangible to assess as the atmosphere in the school ... the complainants undoubtedly had very real feelings of emotional neglect. One can see how a large institution failed to supply the emotional needs of the child, even if the carers did not go further and actually insult and denigrate them. The absence of personal love and encouragement would undoubtedly have left the children with a lack of self-regard and feelings of worthlessness ... The failure to provide for the emotional well-being of the children in the institution is a major failing on the part of the industrial school. It is perhaps the one that most impacted on the long-term psychological development of the child. A child could probably cope much better with obstacles and handicaps in the institution and, later, out of the institution, provided she felt loved and valued as an individual ... But where does the blame for emotional neglect lie? The form of childcare provided by St Vincent's industrial school, Goldenbridge was not a personal whim or caprice of Sister Alida or Sister Venetia. It was a large institution embedded in an institutional structure of child-care approved of by the State authorities ... The role of the Sisters actually running the schools needs to be put in its proper context without denying the emotional reality of the children.

Conclusions

- 7.348**
- 1. Goldenbridge could have operated a kinder regime, where children were safe and secure, in keeping with the aspirations of the Sisters of Mercy, but it failed to do so.**
 - 2. Witnesses described how the conditions in Goldenbridge left them with low self-esteem for the rest of their lives.**
 - 3. Children were routinely humiliated and belittled by the nuns and carers who looked after them.**
 - 4. Children with parents or relatives who kept in touch received more favourable treatment than those children who did not.**
 - 5. Girls left Goldenbridge ill-equipped to deal with the outside world.**

Underwear inspections

7.349 An extreme example of the culture of humiliation that permeated Goldenbridge can be seen in the practice of underwear inspections. Several allegations were made by complainants to the effect that, when their underwear was changed weekly, their underwear was inspected and they were beaten if there was any mark on it. Two complainants said the soiled underwear was paraded on a pole for everyone to see before they received their fresh laundry.

7.350 No reference is made to these allegations in the Opening Statement of the Sisters of Mercy. In their Submissions, however, they say that the 'practice of having to show dirty underwear on a weekly basis is a puzzling one'. They add that:

... it is difficult to see what rational basis there might be for such a practice, except perhaps to check whether older girls might have started their periods, or checking the number on the underwear, or something of that nature. If so, it might have been done on an occasional basis but it would hardly have been a regular event for every girl.

7.351 A witness spoke of the underwear inspection:

We would change our pants once a week. I can see the basket on the corridor, it was a Saturday. Friday night, there would be somebody on the toilet door, but we would go into the toilet, one by one let in and we would wash out pants in the toilet. If we didn't get the chance, we thought we were going to be too long, we would actually spit on them and put them under our sheet and lie on them ... We knew there was an inspection on the Saturday and that we would have to have them clean. If they weren't clean we would get beaten across the bare bum.

7.352 Another witness spoke of having to show her underwear on the day that fresh underwear was distributed to the children. When questioned as to the possible reasons for having to display underwear, she expressed the view that it served to embarrass and humiliate the children. She recalled one particular incident whereby a child's underwear was paraded for all to see:

I do remember one incident in the workroom where there was a pair of panties put on the sweeping brush, the handle of the brush and swung around and everybody have a look at so and so's pants.

7.353 One other witness gave details of the underwear-changing ritual:

We had to show our underwear every Thursday. It could be in the washroom that's where I remember it. You had to show your underpants but normally what we did is we devised methods in how to wash our underwear and we used the toilets in the cisterns to wash our clothes. Sometimes the night before we would put them under the beds to dry.

7.354 When asked what would happen if they displayed them soiled on inspection day, she said 'Oh you would be beaten, severely beaten'.

7.355 Another witness spoke of the terrifying ordeal of a nun or a lay teacher or both displaying the children's underwear on clothes inspection day:

There was in the very early days a practice, I don't know what the correct word, is of a nun or a teacher holding up and making a display of your clothes if they were soiled so we quickly learned that way of overcoming it.

7.356 Yet another witness spoke about the weekly practice of displaying underwear:

We all went up in a single file to show our underwear and we had to have them turned inside out.

In the yard. There was a wicker basket when you come out of the yard to the right hand side and that's where you dropped your underwear. Sr Alida had a pole, it was similar to what you would light candles with in a church, anything that she didn't like, your underwear was hoisted on this pole. Often she would say "hands up who thinks this is dirty". This caused considerable distress and humiliation and we could never ever trust each other because if you were anyway close to somebody you wouldn't put up your hand. If you didn't put up your hand she would come after you, whoever that was.

7.357 Another witness spoke of the same ritual:

We got one change on a Thursday. We had to produce our underpants to see what condition they were in and if they were soiled we were beaten. It was on a Thursday after school that was the way we were treated.

7.358 Another witness told about washing her underwear in the toilet cistern in order to avoid the humiliation of displaying soiled underwear on the clothes inspection day:

That was because if you woke up in the morning and you had dirty underwear there was nowhere you could get it – you didn't get clean underwear every day. You got that once a week. What it was if any of them checked to see if it was dirty then they would give you hell ...

You would get beaten, smacked and the language would be horrific: "You dirty bitch. You filthy bitch". You would be called "wet the bed" as well. They used that very regular ...

You would wash the underwear and you would leave it ... we had rubber sheets and you would leave it under there but if you did that then the mattress would get marked so what you would do is leave it under the sheet and then the sheet would get – sometimes it might get stained and sometimes it might not. If it got stained you were accused of wetting the bed. So you got two goes at it.

7.359 Another witness recalled that the clothes inspection took place in the yard. She felt that the inspection of dirty underwear was like a form of punishment; not every single girl's underwear was checked:

Probably not every single person might have to. I remember I did, I remember when the girls did, but I wouldn't say she went around every single person; I couldn't honest to God say that.

7.360 One further witness, who had a very good recollection of life in Goldenbridge, also spoke about showing the underwear once a week when the fresh underwear was being distributed:

For soiled clothing, every single week because we had to show our underwear once a week to two or three people who had large wicker baskets in front of them. We all stood in line all with our underwear, as we showed them we got hit with a stick.

7.361 **The offensive practice of inspecting underwear was confirmed by many witnesses, including one put forward by the Congregation as a favourable witness. The practice caused extreme embarrassment and humiliation and it was futile and utterly degrading.**

The four cornerstones

7.362 The 'Dear Daughter' programme contained a number of very serious allegations against Goldenbridge and the Sisters of Mercy.

7.363 The Sisters of Mercy have identified what they describe as four key areas in the 'Dear Daughter' programme. They say that these are mistruths that appeared in the programme and subsequently appeared in evidence by complainants who came into the Investigation Committee to speak about

their experiences in Goldenbridge. The Sisters have said that the recurrence of a number of these key issues in the statements that were made to the Investigation Committee casts doubt on the validity of the memories of the women and men who testified. The Sisters of Mercy in their Submission identified four key allegations:

- Scraps – that children were starved and had to fight each other for scraps thrown out to them in the playground each day.
- Water – that children had to drink from the toilets because there was no drinking water available to them day or night.
- Numbers – that children were always referred to by number rather than by name.
- Potties – that babies were mistreated/tied to potties for long periods and frequently suffered from prolapsed rectums as a result.

7.364 The Sisters submitted that a number of complainants got these particular allegations wrong, and that they got them wrong in precisely the same way. They maintain that it is the ‘commonality of the memory errors that gives the clue to their importance’.

Scraps

7.365 In ‘Dear Daughter’, there is a visual image of a colander of scraps being thrown out of a window into a yard and children fighting for the scraps. Eight of the complainants in their witness statements allege that scraps of food were thrown out of a window into the yard, and that the children would scramble and fight each other for these scraps. Eleven complainants made this allegation in oral evidence. They each, in various ways, referred to the poor quality of the food, the fact that they were hungry, and that bread was thrown out of a window at 3 o’clock each day, and the children all scrambled and pushed each other to grab a slice of bread.

7.366 The Sisters of Mercy have agreed with one description of this aspect of life in Goldenbridge. In her evidence to the Committee, a witness said that at 3.30pm, the children would line up in an orderly queue, a window would be opened in the yard, and bread would be distributed from a colander. She said that, if there was any left after all the children had got a slice, it would be just thrown out into the yard:

... they gave you your bread, there was a tray or sometimes there was a big ... colander type of thing and the bread would be in there and they’d give it out to you ... you had to line up. If there was any left and if there was a load of us still there and I would probably be one of them, she would just sometimes throw it out and you would get it. But for your first slice of bread you lined up and you got it ... Instead of queuing up again and everybody would be pushing, she would just throw it and you would grab it.

7.367 She said the bread would first be handed out, and only at the end of this distribution were the scraps thrown into the yard:

No, I can assure you, we lined up first and sometimes there was two people there, actually most of the time there was two people there and they would hand you your bread and you would go and then you would hang around.

7.368 A broadly similar account was also given by another former resident, who said that she could recall a lay worker handing out lumps of bread from a window overlooking the yard and the children queuing for the bread. She said that, after the big lumps of bread were handed out, ‘and then when it gets smaller, she just throws it out to whoever didn’t get any’.

7.369 This account is accepted by the Sisters of Mercy, but other witnesses who spoke about this distribution of bread gave a different version.

7.370 One witness recalled scrambling for scraps that were thrown out of a window in Goldenbridge. Another former resident said that she recalled being hungry all the time and that, during her earlier years in Goldenbridge in the early 1960s, she recalled scraps from the kitchen being thrown out of a window to the children who were playing in the yard: *'I just remember the window being open in the yard and the scraps coming out and we all digging in to get a bit of bread and cake that was left over'*.

7.371 One witness described the distribution of bread in the following terms:

From my memory there was a window in the hall and somebody used to say – word would get around when you'd get scraps 'cos you would get them maybe once a month. Somebody said "we are getting scraps today". It could be from what the lay people had, the crusts could be left over and it would be all thrown into a steel bin, a stainless steel bowl. The window would open and – I am seeing it even as myself, I done it as a child, I done it as a teenager, and that window would open and the bowl of scraps would actually just be thrown out, out the window onto the yard and everybody would scream and charge. You would actually walk on the babies, I am sure I done it myself, it was done on me, and that just went on.

7.372 Another witness said:

But there was a practice of when the teachers had their meals that there would be leftovers and those leftovers would be brought to the yard window and just scattered out the window and we would dive on them. If you managed to get something your day was made.

7.373 Another witness, when asked whether it was possible that the scraps were thrown only at the end of the distribution of bread, stated:

Definitely not ... otherwise I wouldn't feel so horrified and shamed to have to tell you this. First of all, who was going to create this order of this orderly row of children that were hungry to stand in line to wait for bread, who was supervising this? That didn't happen. It was a free for all and the strong ones and the ones that were a bit heavy were the ones that were first to the front of the queue. Obviously the weaklings, I wasn't that weak, but I wasn't very forceful either, they wouldn't fare so well. What was thrown you would just have to clamber for it. People would walk on it with their sandals and you would pick it up and eat it.

7.374 A slightly different version of this story was given by another witness, who said:

The window opened up and whether it be one of the teachers or the helpers they had this huge big – I have it here, they had this huge big sieve and you would have all the different crumbs and all sorts, you might even get a piece of cake in it. They would open up the window and this would be flung out, you would know it was coming. You would stand waiting on it and there would be a dive for the thing, all these little crumbs. If you got a bit of cake, you – you would even beat up the one that had a bigger piece than you, a slice of bread instead of a bit bread. They would just fling it out the window ...

7.375 The Sisters of Mercy assert that this allegation is a serious distortion of 'the practice of bringing out a tray of bread and margarine (or jam) to the children in the yard after school'.

7.376 **Scraps were thrown out of a receptacle into the yard, and children scrambled for them. Whatever the circumstances, this should not have happened and was demeaning for the children.**

Drinking water from toilets

- 7.377** It was alleged that the children in Goldenbridge did not have access to water during the day, and had to resort to drinking water from either the toilet bowl or the cistern.
- 7.378** One witness described it as follows:
- We used to all drink out of the toilets. There was toilets at the end of the yard, we used to go down there. There was no taps, you just flushed the chain and drink the water.*
- 7.379** When asked whether he recalled a drinking fountain in the yard, he said:
- No. There used to be a little push handle thing down, that hardly ever worked. I remember it did work, it didn't always work. I am sure it was there ... We used to ... drink out of the toilets anyway. You followed what the other kids done.*
- 7.380** Another witness said:
- In between meals there was no facility for a glass of water, there was nothing, nowhere you could, we didn't have money to buy anything. There was no machines, no vending in those days. Nothing like that. You would go to the toilets where they had the loose top and you would scoop water up, you would scoop it up in your hand or you would get something like– I don't know how to describe it. It was like a funnel from the big dryers, there was a little connection, you would get it and you would drink the water from the cistern. I mean, you wouldn't think whether this is healthy or unhealthy.*
- 7.381** One witness said:
- We used to drink water out of the toilets, out of the either the bowl or the cistern depending on how tall you were ... I mean, I see in a statement from Sr Alida she said that a tap was in the yard, I don't know where it was because I was never allowed have a drink out of it.*
- 7.382** When asked if she remembered a tap or drinking fountain in the yard, she said:
- I was there for twelve years and I don't remember seeing a tap in the yard. I do remember drinking water out of the toilets, out of the cistern, out of the bowl.*
- 7.383** Another witness said:
- Because they wouldn't give you water. You asked for water and you weren't given it. So obviously to try and survive, you would come out, you would be in the yard and you would go into the toilets in the yard and flush the toilets and drink water from the toilets. That wasn't just a once-off, that was on a good number of occasions.*
- 7.384** Another witness, when asked about the existence of a drinking fountain in the yard, said that if there had been a fountain in the yard it must have been broken 'because we used to drink out literally of the toilet or lift up the cistern, the top of the toilet'.
- 7.385** Sr Alida stated there was a drinking fountain in the yard which came from Liverpool and was marked 'hooligan proof'. It remained in working order until the time she left Goldenbridge. She also stated that children could get water from the kitchen and a small bathroom under the stairs.
- 7.386** One explanation for the lack of access to water is in relation to the problem of bed-wetting which, according to Sr Alida, was 'a huge problem' that existed in Goldenbridge. Sr Alida said they had sought medical advice, and one of the recommendations was the deprivation of all fluids before bedtime.

7.387 However, Sr Venetia stated to Mr Crowley that children used to drink from the toilet cistern. In his report he stated:

Sr Venetia confirmed the allegations in relation to the tumble dryer and drinking from the toilet cistern.

7.388 The Sisters of Mercy denied that children were deprived of water as there was a drinking fountain in the yard. They conceded, however, that on foot of medical advice they deprived children who were prone to wetting the bed of water from a certain time in the afternoon. These children may have resorted to covertly drinking from the toilet. They asserted that this is another example of how a practice became distorted and exaggerated by witnesses.

- 7.389**
- **Children drank out of the toilet, which was confirmed by Sr Venetia when speaking to Mr Crowley in 1996. This happened irrespective of whether the fountain in the yard was working.**
 - **Some children were deprived of water in an effort to cure bed-wetting, and they found water where they could.**

Children referred to by number

7.390 The calling of children by number is another specific allegation made by complainants. They assert that staff referred to them not by name but by number. This is an allegation which appeared in the 'Dear Daughter' programme. It is also an allegation which was made by 11 complainants in their statements to the Commission and in oral evidence. One witness said:

The numbers were used when they were giving out the clothes or anything like that that belonged to the children. Anything that you had marked you always had a number on it. You never had a name on it.

7.391 Another witness also stated that clothes were distributed according to the number of the child. However, under cross-examination, this witness went further and stated that the children were referred to by number.

7.392 Another witness recalled the day that she entered Goldenbrige and was stripped of her own clothes, washed and given a set of clothes that were '*hard, rough, horrible*' and was given a number and told '*never to forget it*'.

7.393 Another witness recalled that, when she entered Goldenbridge, her name was taken away and she was given a number. She said: '*In Goldenbridge I was a number*'.

7.394 This witness was adamant that she was never called by her name, and that it was always by her number. Even when she was cross-examined about the use of the number for the purpose of clothing, she stated that she was called by her number irrespective of whether clothes were being distributed or not.

7.395 Again, another witness when questioned about how he was addressed in Goldenbridge said:

You were called by your surname or your number. It was mainly your surname. You were never called by your name ...

7.396 He also confirmed that the numbers were used for the system of laundering clothes.

7.397 One other witness disagreed with the contention that the numbers were only used for laundry purposes:

Some people they knew very well, the ones that were always in trouble, always getting slapped, some of them would be well known. You would be called by your number ...

7.398 Another witness recounted that she did not recall staff referring to her by her Christian name, but did recall being called by her number.

7.399 The Sisters of Mercy assert that this was never the case; children were never called by a number. The use of numbers was for the purpose of laundry and distributing children's clothing. Each item of the child's clothing was numbered so that, when it was washed and ironed, that same item of clothing could be returned to the appropriate child. Sr Gianna, who worked in the laundry and workroom of Goldenbridge for three years, gave a detailed account of the washing and distribution of the children's clothing. In evidence, Sr Gianna recounted that the children's clothing, once it had been washed and ironed, was brought down to the recreation hall for distribution:

And the numbers called out then. We had them in the big baskets and then you picked out your three articles or four articles and you called out a number and the child who owned these came forward. She went down and she undressed and you had the senior girls there helping the smaller ones to dress and undress. They would bring up their soiled laundry and put it into the baskets.

7.400 Another witness stated that she disagreed with certain aspects of the 'Dear Daughter' programme. In particular, she disagreed with the suggestion in the programme that children were called by number. She said as follows:

Yeah, it wouldn't be always numbers I have to say, because I wasn't always called by numbers. Maybe some other people may have felt it that way, but when I heard that I thought, no, that wasn't me.

7.401 From the evidence of the complainants, what is clear, apart from the issue of the numbers, is that children were not called by their Christian name. In the main, they appear to have been referred to by their numbers, their surnames, or by nicknames.

7.402 **The use of numbers instead of names was not widespread in Goldenbridge. Numbers were used, however, on occasions such as dealing with laundry.**

Babies left sitting on potties for prolonged periods

7.403 This specific allegation, that babies were strapped to potties for long periods of time and suffered a prolapsed rectum, first emerged in the Gay Byrne radio show in 1992. It was repeated on the 'Dear Daughter' programme. A number of complainants made this allegation in their statements of complaint to the Commission. However, in oral evidence it did not feature very largely as an allegation.

7.404 One witness described it in the following terms:

They (babies) were placed on potties, yes. They were strapped down and there were marks on their little bums when they got up. There was one particular child whose back passage used to come down. He was a little boy by the name of

7.405 This complainant further stated when questioned that she herself was aged around eight or nine years when she saw this little boy with what she believed to be a prolapsed rectum.

7.406 Another witness made reference to the strapping of babies to potties:

We used to look after the babies there. There was maybe 50, 60 babies. You used to look after them, you used to have to bath them and change them. You used to stick them on the potties, strapped to potties for hours on end.

7.407 Other witnesses whose job was to mind the babies made no reference to the practice of strapping babies onto potties. One positive witness stated that the babies *‘were so well looked after’*.

7.408 Several witnesses asserted that they only saw one instance of a prolapsed rectum. One witness described the shock of seeing a child with a prolapsed rectum:

In the rec there was toilets down near the stage end and the babies used to be put– the little ones used to be put on the potties. I remember I was sitting more or less facing– there was benches all around the rec, I was facing these children on the potty. I remember one of them stood up and something was hanging down and it really frightened me. I didn’t understand. To this day it is still imprinted on me.

7.409 In her general written statement to the Commission, Sr Alida devoted a section to the care of babies in Goldenbridge. She stated:

Babies were never left sitting on a potty a long time. There was one baby who suffered from a prolapsed rectum, however this girl had this problem on admission. There was no question of young children looking after our babies and no-one was ever taught to reinsert a baby’s rectum as some complainants describe.

7.410 Sr Alida said that children were placed on potties when they got up in the morning, after every meal and before they went to bed. She said they would be left for about 12 minutes on each occasion. This represents a total of six occasions per day that children would have been placed on potties, for a total period of 72 minutes at least. This would have been a considerable proportion of the day for toddlers or small children. Many witnesses have described a fairly rigid system regarding toilet training. With a large number of babies to toilet train and with the limited staff available, individual attention was not possible. After a certain age, children were not provided with nappies, and older residents would be required to sluice out soiled sheets and bedding as well as clean excrement off children who had soiled or wet in the night. That said, the general view was that Sr Alida was kind and loving towards the babies and, in her testimony to the Investigation Committee, she said:

Babies you could compensate, the babies we loved and we hugged and we gave every kind of care to babies. They got the best. Any baby that came to our care, I can only say they got the best.

7.411 **Sr Alida showed kindness to babies, but caring for large numbers of them with inadequate staff led to a regimented approach in which babies were left sitting on potties for long periods of time.**

General conclusion on the four cornerstones

7.412 **Each of these allegations highlighted by the ‘Dear Daughter’ programme had a basis in fact. While there were differences in perception as between the Congregation and the complainants, complainants who referred to these elements did not thereby become unreliable witnesses.**

Neglect

General living conditions

7.413 The General Inspection and Medical Reports of the Department of Education and Science give some indication of the general living conditions of the children. Sr Alida, who had worked in the School for over 20 years, also provided some information on this issue.

- 7.414** The first available documentary piece of information is an Inspection Report from the Department's Medical Inspector, Dr Anna McCabe, in August 1939. She reported four cases of scabies. In a report the following year, she noted two instances of scabies.
- 7.415** In March 1941, Dr McCabe carried out a general inspection and found that the School was 'well kept' and satisfactory in all areas. There is no General Inspection Report for 1942.
- 7.416** When Sr Alida and Sr Bianca arrived in August 1942, they found the children in an appalling condition. The majority of the children were suffering from scabies and ringworm of the scalp. Sr Alida said:
- They had skin trouble which I never saw before, it was scabies. I'd say 75 percent of the children would have scabies at that time ... they had ringworm of the scalp a number of them ... it would be big abscesses in their hair, that the hair couldn't be combed.*
- 7.417** Sr Bianca set about dealing with the situation immediately. She closed the School for two weeks. During this two-week period, the children were bathed and their bodies were covered with an ointment for the treatment of scabies and they were sent to bed. Every three days, the procedure was repeated until the infection was gone. Their clothes were sent to the laundry, and Sr Bianca spent all of her time in the laundry disinfecting the clothes by steam boiling, with the help of those girls who were not infected. After three days, the ointment had soaked into the children's bodies and killed the infection. Sr Bianca contacted Dublin Corporation, who organised for the children's bedclothes to be removed and disinfected.
- 7.418** Ringworm was more difficult to treat because there were abscesses on the children's heads. Sr Alida said:
- They went to Steeven's Hospital with those. In the hospital, first of all, they were drawing pus and the hair was stuck onto their heads, it was very nasty to describe. I think in Steevens' Hospital they recommended cutting the hair and you had to take it off bit by bit to get the hair away ... Lotion was then applied to the scalp which killed the hairs and plaster was put on the head in strips, which was then pulled off and when they pulled off the plaster they pulled the roots of the hair out as well.*
- 7.419** The General Inspection Reports made no reference to these conditions at all. The following year, Dr McCabe recorded that the School was 'well kept' and that most areas were 'satisfactory', but she criticised the condition of the children, saying they could be 'cleaner and neater'.
- 7.420** The next inspection took place on 27th January 1944 and she commented that the premises were 'very well kept, clean and tidy' and most areas were found to be 'satisfactory', but she found that the 'children looked far from being neat and tidy'. She said that their clothes were 'tattered and untidy' and their blankets were 'thin and worn'. The cause of the thinness of the blankets, according to Sr Alida, arose from the process of disinfecting them during the scabies outbreak in 1942. Dr McCabe recommended replacing the blankets and supplying each child with a toothbrush and for the dentist to visit every quarter. She also sought greater supervision of the younger children. In her evidence, Sr Alida said that it took years to replace the blankets and eventually they got seconds from Foxford Manufacturers.
- 7.421** In June 1944, there was another outbreak of ringworm in the School. Sr Bianca informed the Department that several children had contracted ringworm, and she sought an increase in the maintenance allowance to cover the cost of treatment. Dr McCabe's advice was sought by the Department in relation to the treatment for ringworm, and her response was that the School was expected to cover the cost of medical treatment for children from the grant received.

- 7.422** Dr McCabe carried out a General Inspection on 28th June 1944 and she found that the standard of cleanliness and supervision of the children had improved, but she was not completely satisfied with the conditions. All the children had not been supplied with toothbrushes, the dentist had not paid a quarterly visit, and the blankets had not been replaced. The Department made these observations known to the Resident Manager. In the Medical Inspection conducted during the same visit, Dr McCabe noted four children required treatment for ringworm.
- 7.423** Dr McCabe's General Inspection Reports from 1948 until her retirement in 1963 were, without exception, very positive. Her reports during these years were not very detailed and were, in fact, quite repetitive in content. She frequently stated that the School was 'well run' and in some years remarked that it was 'extremely well run'²² or 'very well conducted'.²³ She also commented in her reports that 'many improvements had been made and continued to be made' to the School.²⁴ The exact nature of these improvements was not detailed in these reports. Throughout this time period, Dr McCabe singled out the Resident Manager for praise. In her General Inspection Report of January 1959 and 1960, she said 'Sr Alida an excellent nun ... knows many things about running a good school'. Dr McCabe's General Inspection Reports of 1963 referred to the fact that 'Sr Venetia is now Res. Manager and is doing very well being a disciple of Sr Alida she is excellent'.
- 7.424** The Medical Reports during this period were glowing, with reference often made to the fact that small children and babies are particularly well cared for. But in her Medical Inspection Report of May 1955, Dr McCabe noted that 11 children were receiving treatment for scabies.
- 7.425** The General Inspection Reports after Dr McCabe's retirement continued to be very favourable about the living conditions in the School. Dr Charles Lysaght, who carried out a General Inspection of the School on 21st March 1966, commented that it was 'well run': the premises were clean and in 'good repair' and the accommodation consisted mostly of modern buildings with 'excellent dormitory accommodation'.
- 7.426** Sr Venetia came in for particular praise from Dr Lysaght when he referred to her as being 'most competent and appears dedicated to the work'.
- 7.427** In the 1970s, Graham Granville took over as the Department's General Inspector. His reports were also very favourable of the living conditions and the premises and accommodation. However, there were only three reports for the entire period of the 1970s, namely 1971, 1976 and 1978 because of staff shortages in the Department of Education.
- 7.428** Mr Granville was concerned about the lack of qualifications of the staff and the change in the type of child that was being admitted. A lot of the children were categorised as disturbed. Proposals for the group home system were advocated, and sanction was given, but these plans were not carried through until the 1980s.

Conclusions

- 7.429**
- **The severity of the problem tackled by Sr Bianca and Sr Alida disclosed evidence of severe neglect.**
 - **The work undertaken by these two nuns was heavy and relentless and brought about immediate improvements to the School.**
 - **The absence of reference to these problems in the Departmental Medical Reports discloses a weakness of the inspections.**

²² General Inspection Reports 1953, 1954.

²³ General Inspection Reports 1955, 1956, 1957, 1958, 1959, 1960, 1962, 1963.

²⁴ General Inspection Reports 1955, 1957, 1958, 1959, 1960.

Education

- 7.430** The children in Goldenbridge were educated in their own internal national school. There was another national school within the same grounds run by the Sisters of Mercy for the children of the locality. The Cussen Report recommended that, where possible, children should be educated in external national schools. It identified a drop in standards in literary education in internal national schools, and attributed this to the fact that the teachers employed were not well qualified. Cussen also recommended that salaries of teachers in internal national schools attached to industrial schools should be paid by the Department of Education, in the same way as in ordinary national schools.
- 7.431** A Department of Education inspection conducted in 1939, for the purposes of considering whether teachers' salaries in the internal national school should be paid by the State, queried why the children in Goldenbridge did not attend the local national school. The reasons proffered by the Resident Manager was that the local schools were already overcrowded. She was also opposed to the children being transported to other schools, on the basis that she could not be held responsible for them once they left the Industrial School. The Department accepted this explanation and proceeded to certify the internal national school and to pay the teachers' salaries from 1941.
- 7.432** The Department of Education school inspection report for March 1935 had noted a very satisfactory educational standard in Goldenbridge, with each school subject rated either 'very good' or 'good on the whole'. The report concluded that the School was 'good on the whole' and:
- Order, discipline and politeness leave nothing to be desired. The tastefully decorated schoolrooms are an education in themselves. Taken class-by-class, progress in subjects is at least satisfactory and in quite a few subjects very satisfactory. It must be added that the average age of the pupils according to classification is high. This is due to (the fact that) many of the pupils when enrolled are very backward. Promotions from year to year are quite regular.
- 7.433** The report noted that the internal national school had 140 pupils taught by five full-time and two part-time teachers. Two of the teachers were nuns and three were lay staff. None of the teachers was formally qualified, although they all had many years of experience. Staffing levels were described as 'quite adequate'.
- 7.434** Within seven years, standards in the school had plummeted. Sr Alida painted a grim picture of conditions in the internal national school. She recalled that, upon her arrival in 1942, there were only two untrained lay teachers responsible for educating 150 children of different ages and abilities. These two teachers were ill-equipped to deal with this workload.
- 7.435** The school curriculum was the same as that taught in every national school in the country. The children did not, however, receive homework in the evenings. From the late 1950s, children who showed academic ability were given the opportunity of pursuing post primary education because of a scholarship fund set up by the Archbishop of Dublin.
- 7.436** In 1977, Goldenbridge was recognised as a 'special school' by the Department of Education.

Evidence of the Sisters of Mercy

- 7.437** The Sisters of Mercy confirmed in their Opening Statement that homework was not a feature of the internal national school. In addition to the normal national school curriculum, children aged 13 and over participated in a domestic economy training module overseen by the Department of Education. This training took place in the afternoons. The children were also taught physical education, dancing and social skills by teachers employed especially for these purposes.

7.438 The Sisters of Mercy conceded that:

With hindsight it seems likely that many of the children attending the school had particular educational difficulties given their disadvantaged backgrounds and, in some cases, disrupted schooling. Many were undoubtedly in need of what would now be termed remedial education. Until late in the 1960s the fact that some of the children had special educational needs was not recognised. In due course in 1977 the school itself was given “special school” status. In the 1940s and 1950s however, there were no special facilities, teachers or resources to take account of those special needs and it is undoubtedly the case that the method of education provided was inadequate for the needs of many of the children.

7.439 It is surprising that no programme existed within Goldenbridge itself to identify these children’s needs and to help them. While it is accepted that, at a national level, programmes like these did not exist, the Sisters of Mercy were engaged in providing a specialist service for a very long period of time, and they were the people best placed to identify the needs of the children in the Industrial School and to provide for them.

7.440 Whilst the Sisters of Mercy may rightly criticise the Department of Education for failing to identify the particular needs of the children in the Institution, they themselves must take some responsibility for failing to take any initiatives in this regard over the very many decades that they were engaged in this work.

7.441 On the issue of corporal punishment, the Sisters of Mercy suggested that it was no more than would have been in existence in any other national school around the country.

7.442 Corporal punishment was part of the routine in the Goldenbridge internal school. Allegations of corporal punishment made against both Sisters and lay teachers appear to be correct in many instances. One of the lay teachers who gave evidence to the Committee has admitted, with some regret, that she did use corporal punishment whilst she was a teacher in Goldenbridge.

7.443 The Congregation stated:

The use of corporal punishment in the classroom setting was inevitably non-productive, and has caused indelible memories of being slapped or beaten for no reason. Poor educational achievement and inability to find employment other than in domestic or low grade service was the consequence for many children.

7.444 The Congregation added that there was little doubt that practices such as correcting left-handedness and wearing dunce’s hats may also have been used. It posed the following question:

the question must be asked as to whether this type and level of education was so significantly different to that available to the average Irish child of the time, as to constitute abuse?

7.445 The Sisters of Mercy do not accept that children were taken out of school to perform chores. They conceded that it may have happened occasionally, with girls over 13 years of age, but it was not an established or widespread practice. The Congregation vehemently denied that the Sisters conspired to help the children pass the Primary Certificate.

Evidence of respondents

7.446 Sr Alida testified that, when she arrived in Goldenbridge, there was a very poor standard of education in the School. There were only two untrained lay teachers, Ms Kearney and Ms Dempsey, whose duties were not limited to the classroom. Apart from being responsible for the

education of the entire school, they also acted as carers to the children and were provided with board and lodgings in the School. Sr Alida stated that she did not know how they managed.

7.447 Both Sr Alida and Sr Bianca took up teaching positions in the school alongside Ms Kearney and Ms Dempsey, who at this point moved to lodgings outside the School. Sr Bianca had 10 years' teaching experience behind her, and Sr Alida had none. Sr Alida had hoped to give up teaching and dedicate herself full-time to the care of the 150 children aged between four and 16. However, as she was a qualified teacher and there was a clear shortage of teachers in Goldenbridge, her teaching skills were too valuable to put to one side. Her principal role in the Institution was as a teacher and, even when she took over as Sister in Charge in 1954, she continued to teach full-time until she left. When asked whether she received any training or instruction in relation to how to deal with such large numbers of children, Sr Alida said she had received '*none whatsoever. I think you had to use your own head*'.

7.448 Only two of the classrooms appeared to be in use, the other two had clearly fallen into disuse, and one even lacked the most basic classroom equipment such as desks and benches. There was no roll book in use. Sr Bianca set about acquiring equipment for the classrooms in Goldenbridge. She also ordered playground equipment from England, and Sr Alida recalled swings, a merry-go-round and a drinking fountain being installed in the playground.

7.449 Sr Alida was adamant that she did the best she could to give the children a proper education:

I did as good as I could to give the opportunities to children and given the best I could give for them in clothes, food and everything else and education. In between there must be many children who said to me today, "I didn't get a chance." There is one who does say it, "I didn't get an education". ... Many of them got into assistant nursing and into children's nursing. Our standard of education couldn't be that bad. I am not saying it was first class or high, because the children coming in to us had experience of school before they came. Many came from non-school attendance. Our level -- we never had trouble with inspectors about the level of education in our schools.

7.450 Ms Kearney, who worked as a lay teacher, confirmed that, after finishing her own schooling, she completed a course in domestic economy before commencing her first teaching position in the mid-1930s in Goldenbridge. She shared a classroom with a senior teacher, Ms Dempsey. Neither was formally qualified to teach at that time. Ms Kearney stated that she was very glad to get the job in Goldenbridge:

I was always afraid of doing or saying anything wrong, that I would be sacked, that was my one fear.

7.451 Both teachers used a leather to discipline the children, although Ms Kearney discontinued its use once she discovered how painful it was by mistakenly hitting herself with it.

7.452 Ms Dempsey taught first and second class, and Ms Kearney taught third and fourth class. She was on duty until 10pm every other day, working in a supervisory capacity, once class was over. The older children helped with the care of the younger children.

7.453 In 1946, Ms Kearney applied for and was granted provisional recognition as a primary school teacher. This qualified her to teach only in an industrial school. She continued to teach in Goldenbridge until she left.

7.454 When asked if there were things that she would have spoken about if she didn't have the fear of being sacked, she said:

Sure ... well for one I would have loved to have seen the children with more space. I would have liked to have seen them with warmer clothes on them, because at the time that I went in there first they were very basic. More freedom. ... There were lots of children I would have loved to have hugged and cuddled. They were so lovely, but the bold girls would take it out on them, call them names, teacher's pet, you know and shout at them and that.

7.455 Once she became a permanent teacher, Ms Kearney stated that she was no longer fearful of losing her job. At that stage, she no longer lived in the School and was unaware of day-to-day living conditions. She said that she, therefore, had no reason to complain.

7.456 Ms Kearney stated that she had been of a sunny disposition before starting in Goldenbridge, but that this changed as the years went by. Ms Kearney found her job more difficult after the arrival of Sr Bianca and Sr Alida. She noticed a deterioration in the attitude of the children, who became sullen and defiant. In her view, Goldenbridge was not a happy place, but she did the best she could in the circumstances.

Evidence of complainants

7.457 A number of complainants spoke about their memory of the education that they received in Goldenbridge and the impact this had on their later life. The main issues which arose during the course of the complainants' evidence were:

- The low standard of education.
- Excessive use of corporal punishment, which led to an atmosphere of fear in the classroom, which in turn led to an inability to learn effectively.
- The arbitrary manner in which a few students were chosen to attend the external national school, which opened up the opportunity of progressing to secondary school.
- Children being taken out of school to perform domestic chores.
- Low self-esteem and lack of confidence as a result of the low standard of education and often leaving school without any qualifications.

7.458 Some of the complainants had quite positive memories of their school days in Goldenbridge, and believed that they did come away with a basic primary education for which they were grateful.

7.459 One complainant, who was in Goldenbridge in the early 1950s, made an interesting comparison between the education she received in Goldenbridge and that which she received at an English school, which she attended immediately after leaving Goldenbridge. She said that in Goldenbridge, although she loved learning, she had not learnt anything in the School. When she was removed by her father from the Institution, aged 11, and brought to England, she attended school and got on very well there, despite her abusive family circumstances. Her description of that period was as follows:

It was like a blossoming period. When I went to the school in England I craved education. That was my way of trying to conquer what life had done to me. I went to this little school and when we used to be asked to read and write, reading, I used to think to myself "please don't come to us" because I used to stammer and stutter and I had a thick accent apparently. I am there on this particular one day there was reading going on and I was stammering to myself, "please don't ask me, please don't ask me", the teacher did ask me to read and I got up and the urine was running down my legs again, I always smelt of urine, I stunk of it. I was sitting there and I was waiting for the teacher to clatter me or batter me, but I never saw it. I was only there for a few weeks and I had come on in leaps and bounds ... When I went there I crammed – once I knew that I wasn't going to get beaten, it was wonderful. Anything I could get to read, I loved it, it was a wonderful period

of time ... I managed to scrape through that 11+ ... I have always loved reading and writing and spelling and that and general knowledge and all that. It was a wonderful period.

7.460 The Congregation argued that it was a tribute, to some extent, to the teaching she received in the Institution that she was able to pass the 11+ exam within nine months of leaving. The complainant disagreed, and credited her examination success entirely to the schooling she received in England. The contrast that she made between the atmosphere in the classroom in England and in Goldenbridge is significant. Almost all of the complainants who spoke of school in Goldenbridge spoke of a fear of corporal punishment.

7.461 Another complainant, who was committed to Goldenbridge at the age of seven in the early 1950s and remained there for nine years, recalled regular punishment by the teachers. She stated that she was constantly taken out of school to look after her sister, who was unwell, or to look after babies. As a result, she stated that she was not a good scholar. In the late 1950s, she sat the Primary Certificate and failed. She was registered to repeat the examination, but the record indicates that she was marked absent.

7.462 One complainant who attended Goldenbridge in the 1950s stated that she left Goldenbridge without being able to write at the age of 14. She recalled:

In Sr Alida's class I know I was very stupid. I didn't seem to be able to learn. All I know is that I was getting smacked, for being stupid I was getting smacked ... She would put me down in the corner ... but then I was so happy to be in the corner, because when you are in the corner you don't have to learn.

7.463 This complainant asserted that she learnt nothing in the classroom because she was in a constant state of fear of being punished, and she recalled regularly feeling nauseous. She described how she learned to tell the time from a toy watch belonging to one of the other children while she was cleaning the dormitories in the morning:

I learned the clock under the bed, I learned a watch, how to tell the time. It was wonderful to learn the time because I was so stupid.

7.464 She did in fact sit her Primary Certificate while she was there, but she failed it.

7.465 A witness who was committed to Goldenbridge in the 1950s at the age of three and remained until her 16th birthday recalled receiving very little education during her time in Goldenbridge. From the age of nine, she was regularly called out of class in order to carry out domestic chores. After roll call, she said catechism class was held. Once this class was over, a nun would come in and call out seven or eight names. These children then left class to do chores. Whilst she stated that she was not called out every day, it occurred regularly enough to prevent her from obtaining a proper education.

7.466 Another complainant, who spent 12 years in Goldenbridge from the mid-1950s, recalled being slapped regularly and severely in the classroom by lay teachers. She said that Goldenbridge improved slightly in the 1960s, and a number of children were sent out to do secretarial courses towards the end of their time there.

7.467 A witness, who was sent to Goldenbridge in the mid-1950s at the age of eight, stated that she received a very poor standard of education. She was regularly called out of class to carry out household chores. Her performance was also affected by a constant sense of fear she felt in class, a fear which remains with her today. She did not sit her Primary Certificate.

7.468 Another witness, who was committed to Goldenbridge in the early 1960s when she was nine years of age, said she could not read or write when she arrived in Goldenbridge, nor could she read or write when she left. This fact, which disabled her all her life, left her with a strong sense of frustration. In later life, she took advantage of the education fund put in place by the Sisters of Mercy and received lessons from a professional tutor.

7.469 Whilst she arrived in Goldenbridge with absolutely no education, she did not receive any help or encouragement that might have given her the basics of reading and writing whilst she was there. She was regularly taken out of class to mind young children. She loved minding children and, had she had a choice of careers, she would have chosen to be a children's nurse. However, her educational disadvantage ruled out such a career.

7.470 A complainant, who was in Goldenbridge for nine years from the late 1950s, recalled being taught by Ms Dempsey, who had a habit of pulling the children's cheeks and twisting their ears if they did not know their lessons. She recalled being made to wear a dunce's hat on occasion. She said that:

We had to stand on the chairs as well, hands on our heads, fingers on lips. Sometimes we had to kneel on those wooden chairs as well.

7.471 This regime continued into the next classes:

Ms Kearney on the other hand, you had to keep your elbows in at all times when you were writing. The letters had to be like a proper – what's the word – sort of slant, rounded and turned ... She had a small stick and your elbows would really be beaten ... After I left Goldenbridge I don't think I wrote again really until I was in my 40s.

Post primary education

7.472 From the late 1950s, a few children were sent to the local secondary top, sometimes having already been transferred to the local national school. Bishop Dunne set up a fund for providing post primary education for the children of Goldenbridge. These children were afforded study time in the evening and allowed to forgo some of the usual domestic chores, including bead making.

7.473 One complainant stated that she attended secondary school because her father paid for her upkeep in Goldenbridge and requested that she do so. She said that only a few of the girls were given the opportunity of advancing their education:

There was only a few of us that were allowed to go to secondary school. For example, the girl I mentioned earlier, she was very bright but a punishment for her was that she couldn't go to secondary. It was very selective.

7.474 She confirmed that those attending external school did receive some remission of the amount of time they spent bead making.

7.475 Another witness started her education in the internal national school. Her father took an interest in her education and that of her sisters. It was at his insistence that they were transferred to the external national school and later to secondary school.

7.476 She stated that she was considerably behind the rest of the class once she left the internal national school. Added to her difficulties was the fact that she suffered from mild dyslexia. She recalled her father giving her a flashlight to enable her to learn spellings whilst in bed at night. She completed her Intermediate Certificate, but did not proceed to sit the Leaving Certificate examination.

7.477 A complainant who was in Goldenbridge in the 1960s recalled being taught by Ms Dempsey and Ms Kearney. She conceded that they were good teachers but thought that they were very cruel. She pitied the children who found their classes difficult because they were punished relentlessly. Ms Dempsey would beat children, pull them by the ear and place children in the dunces' corner for hours as punishment.

7.478 This complainant did proceed to secondary school, and expressed her gratitude at having been given the opportunity. However, the manner in which the children were chosen was somewhat arbitrary. She recalled that, one day, Sr Venetia came into the classroom, wrote a sum on the blackboard, and told the children to put their hands up when they had completed it. The complainant was the first to complete the sum and, on that basis, she was selected with two others to go to secondary school. She said that this occurred after Christmas and, therefore, she had missed the first term:

We went to the secondary school the next day. I hadn't a breeze ... In no time I realised I knew nothing. I felt quite competent in the national school, in fairness I felt quite competent, but I hadn't a breeze, not a breeze ... I tried to survive as best I could, I tried to do whatever I could. But unfortunately, as I felt at the time, it was completely in vain because I failed my Inter Cert. Destroyed me. I had worked so hard and it was all for nothing.

7.479 Sr Alida spoke about the difficulty in choosing children to send to the external secondary school to progress their education:

When secondary education became available in the local school I promoted one child once, four in the next set and then – looking back on it now it was difficult because there are people complaining that they weren't chosen. It was very hard to know who you could pick, who was most entitled to, who would benefit most from it, and you had to try and give the advantage where possible. I did that to the best of my ability and people benefited from it in the ways that others did not.

7.480 The Sisters of Mercy pointed out that secondary schooling was available to only a minority of Irish children until the late 1960s, and that limited education and limited career opportunities were the order of the day for the average Irish child. The Congregation asserted that complaints from some witnesses that they were not given opportunities to fulfil their full potential illustrated the dangers of viewing the past through modern lenses. The Sisters of Mercy claimed that what was considered adequate at the time may, with hindsight, appear to a particular complainant not only as insufficient but abusive.

7.481 The Sisters did not address whether they themselves could have made places available in their secondary schools for children who showed academic ability. This was not done prior to Bishop Dunne's initiative, when children were largely prepared for a life of domestic service only. After 1968, when free education was introduced nationally, more children did get the chance to avail of second level education.

Conclusions

- **The standard of education in the internal primary school was not as high as in the external school.**
- **The use of excessive corporal punishment affected the ability of the children to learn.**
- **There is evidence that children between the ages of seven and 13 were taken out of school for domestic duties and some were taken out more frequently than others.**

- There was a lack of educational opportunity in Goldenbridge. The Industrial School was intended to educate and train for future employment, but many of the children were only trained for domestic service.
- The Sisters of Mercy did not fraudulently assist children to pass their Primary Certificates.
- Efforts were made in the 1960s to send some girls on to secondary school or into secretarial colleges or nursing. These were the fortunate few, and it would appear that most left the School with no more than a Primary Certificate, and very many did not achieve this standard.
- Some children arrived in Goldenbridge having fallen behind in their education or having had no education. No real effort was made to address serious disadvantages for children when they arrived, and there was no encouragement given to them to progress.

Chores

7.482 Many complainants gave evidence of the onerous duties imposed on them in Goldenbridge, which they claimed were not appropriate to their age or their physical abilities. The use of domestic work as a form of punishment was also referred to by a number of complainants.

7.483 On the other hand, the former residents who gave evidence to the Investigation Committee of their positive experiences in Goldenbridge did not feel that the chores they were required to carry out impacted upon them negatively.

Evidence of the Sisters of Mercy

7.484 In their Opening Statement, the Sisters of Mercy described the daily routine:

After breakfast every child old enough performed household chores suitable for their age for about half an hour before school, such as cleaning up the dining room, dusting corridors, helping with getting the babies or toddlers dressed and so on.

7.485 They said that, from 1.30pm, children from the age of 13 attended industrial training classes. Different age groups were assigned to do different chores including cookery, needlework, laundry or housekeeping in rotation. A different routine prevailed at weekends. Saturday was laundry day, and many children helped the Sisters with sorting and folding laundry. More time was devoted to household chores on Saturday, and the School got a thorough cleaning.

7.486 In their written Submissions, the Sisters of Mercy accepted the following:

- the children carried out chores in the morning for about half an hour after their breakfast and before school;
- the children strung rosary beads from Monday to Friday for several hours after school between 3.30 and 6.00pm and sometimes later into the evening, if there was pressure to complete a quota. They also worked at beads for several hours on Saturday;
- the children participated in a general clean up of the school on a Saturday, as well as helping with the laundry;
- the children participated in an industrial training programme from the age of thirteen. This programme took place in the afternoons after dinner.

7.487 The Sisters of Mercy submitted that, given the substantial amount of chores, it is not surprising that complainants had general memories of much work and little recreation. They added that it is possible that former residents may not have very precise memories of the age at which they performed certain chores; what jobs were done before school and on Saturdays, and what jobs

fell within the remit of the industrial training programme, in which all girls over the age of 13 participated.

7.488 The Congregation submitted that laundry was a large part of the routine in Goldenbridge, given the number of children. Children of all ages were expected to help. The older children would have been required to do the heavier work. It was suggested by the Congregation during hearings that younger children would have gone along to help the older girls and that it was in fact quite a social occasion. It does not accept that young children were taken out of school to work in the laundry. In support of this, the Congregation pointed out that laundry only took place on two days during the week, one of which was Saturday, when many of the children helped out. The existence of such a practice would have meant that the School relied, rather irrationally, on the labour of small children, when there was a ready supply of older, stronger girls available. The Congregation added that, given the fact that children may have done laundry as part of the domestic training programme as well as laundry on Saturdays, it may be the case that complainants were confused as to when precisely they did laundry. The Sisters of Mercy noted that none of the complainants appeared to remember laundry featuring as part of the industrial training programme at all. They contended that what complainants regarded as an onerous chore was in fact industrial training for their own benefit.

7.489 The Sisters of Mercy conceded that the School was self-sufficient because of the input of the girls helping around the School, and they made reference to a woman employed to work in the laundry, and a member of staff who helped in the kitchen. They contended that the chores which the children performed were not out of keeping with the standards of the time and could not be labelled abusive.

7.490 The Congregation was adamant that children as young as seven or eight were not taken out of school to perform chores, but that children over 13 years of age participated in an industrial training program in the afternoons. This programme adopted a three-pronged approach to industrial training: cookery, laundry, and housekeeping duties. This would have entailed a certain amount of domestic work around the Institution. The Congregation stated:

At this remove in time, it is probably impossible to say that children over the age of twelve were not, on occasion taken in the afternoon to carry out domestic chores, be it laundry, minding younger children or helping in the kitchen. This may have been more likely with girls who showed little interest or ability at school.

Evidence of respondents

7.491 Sr Alida said that there was a course in domestic economy training including cooking, sewing and laundry for girls over 13 years of age. They partook in this training in the afternoon, having spent the morning in school.

7.492 On chores, Sr Alida accepted that:

It would be correct to say, and I only recently appreciated it, that all the caring in the house, when I say caring, the chores, the housekeeping jobs, were all done by big girls and remember we would have about 80 girls over 12 in the house ...

7.493 Chores included washing and dressing the younger children, sweeping and scrubbing the floors, caring for the babies, and working in the kitchen and the laundry. Sr Alida accepted that the chores could be difficult:

In my early day the charges were quite difficult in the sense that it was maintaining the floors mainly around the house and dormitory, but particularly in the corridors and the kitchen. They were old tiled floors, black and red tiles, and they were worn with the hundred years of wear. They were horrible to work on. That was one of the biggest chores

in the house because there were long corridors on the ground floor, the front door and the hall. The hall was new and modern but the rest was old.

7.494 She added that, under her management, these corridors were covered with a substance called tapiflex, which made a huge difference to cleaning. Sr Alida accepted that the chores were difficult, *'except that there were many hands to do it'*.

7.495 Ms Garvin spent 13 years working as a teacher in Goldenbridge. She stated that, when she arrived in the School, there was an extensive domestic training programme in place for the older girls. The household chores performed by these girls formed part of the household management element of this programme. Chores included cleaning, laundry, cookery and sewing.

7.496 Sr Gianna's duties involved working in the workroom, mending and sorting clothes or working in the laundry on a Monday or Friday. She never saw children younger than 13 working in the laundry. She stated that the older girls were involved in keeping the School clean.

Evidence of complainants

7.497 The evidence of the complainants was that they had a number of chores to perform daily, from a very young age, and that these were in addition to the many hours spent at bead making.

7.498 A complainant who was in Goldenbridge during the 1950s and early 1960s told of the chores she performed every day. She stated that, after roll call, a number of names were called out and these children were sent to do chores. This happened on a regular basis:

All I can remember is washing floors, scrubbing floors, scrubbing dormitories, doing laundry, making rosary beads. It was constant, hardly any education at all. The only thing you were really there for was catechism lessons in the morning. Apart from that you were taken out of school as soon as you got to the age where you could scrub floors, do whatever you had to do.

7.499 She described the work in the dormitories, each of which had about 30 or 40 beds:

We had to lift those, they were heavy metal beds. We used to lift them to one side of the room, and sweep, wash and scrub the rooms ... It would take quite a few hours, because they were big dormitories ... If it wasn't done properly they would make you do the whole thing again ... there would be eight of us who used to do it together.

7.500 If the work was not completed satisfactorily, it would have to be redone, and she was sent to the landing to be punished by Sr Alida.

7.501 She also described working in the laundry as very heavy work. They had big boilers in which to boil sheets. She described the procedure of washing these sheets:

you had wooden tongs, which you would pull them from the boiler, into another cooler, which would rinse the sheets, and then put them through wringers and then hang them out. We used to have big baskets with all the sheets into them.

7.502 The most difficult part of the laundry work was lifting and pulling the sheets from one boiler to another. She had to stand on steps to reach the boiler and was always nervous of falling in.

7.503 In addition to laundry and cleaning, she also recalled looking after babies. She recalled bathing them, putting them on potties and changing nappies. Although she described what, by any standards, was a heavy burden of chores, her main complaint was not so much about the chores she had to carry out but the manner in which they interfered with her education.

- 7.504** One witness described how, when she was nine, she had been required to scrub the cobblestoned area in the bathroom as punishment for tearing her dress. She had to kneel down on the cobblestones to do this, which was painful. Although this was a chore that the children regularly carried out, she had to do it on her own by way of punishment.
- 7.505** She also stated that she was taken out of Sr Venetia's class to work in the laundry on Mondays and Fridays. She described the large vat-like boilers with very hot water, and using a stick to pull sheets from the boilers and push them through wringers before they were laid out to dry. The main laundry was done in the large industrial laundry attached to the School, but there was a certain amount of washing by hand that had to be done on a daily basis arising out of bed-wetting.
- 7.506** One complainant who was in Goldenbridge during the 1960s said that she believed that the fact that her father was a regular visitor to the School saved her and her sister from the hardest physical work in the School. She lived in fear of something happening to her father, which would have left her at the mercy of the nuns:
- I remember thinking, if anything happens to you we are finished. We would be totally sucked in here because people that had nobody were the ones that did – and the ones with low intelligence, God help them, they were the ones that were given the hardest work. We had big hoovers in those days, big heavy hoovers, washing hallway floors, the corridors. I was terrified that this is what would become of us. We would end up like cleaners for the rest of our lives. It devastated me.*
- 7.507** One complainant, who was committed to Goldenbridge for four years at the age of five in the early 1960s, stated that he had clear memories of working regularly in the laundry as an alternative to bead making in the afternoons. He recalled an incident, while working in the laundry, in which a boy younger than him caught his arm in a mangle. The complainant was afraid and he ran away. Sometime later, he saw the boy with his injured arm in plaster-of-paris.
- 7.508** This complainant stated that he first started working in the laundry approximately one year after he arrived, which would make him six years old.
- 7.509** A witness, who was in Goldenbridge during the 1960s, spoke in detail of the chores that were required of the children:
- I remember sweeping that dormitory, that sounds like nothing, but first you had to pull every bed into the centre of the room, right, lift the bed ... Then lift the bed and shove it back in. I could do it with one hand I became so adept at it and they were heavy.*
- 7.510** She spoke of other duties:
- the scrubbing and cleaning of the building. I mean we scrubbed and cleaned that entire building and that was a big building, well it seemed huge to us ... When I went there first they didn't have heavy, you know, the hoovers? ... They had a reddish floor polish. They had mansion polish, stuff like that. I don't know is that the same, but there is a very strong smelling kind of petroleum type smell off this oil. We used to put it on the floor and then on our knees polish it.*
- 7.511** The flooring was made of lino and, in order to polish it, the children would skid across the room on the polishing rag. This made light of the chore and they enjoyed it. The Sisters later acquired large industrial hoovers which the children used to clean the floors.
- 7.512** Evidence from a number of complainants was heard of girls being required to clean blocked sewers and toilets. The Sisters of Mercy stated that this work was done by a handyman employed by the School, and that no child would have to be involved in such work. However, complainants

have stated that newspaper rather than toilet paper was used, which resulted in toilets becoming blocked regularly, and one or two girls would be singled out for the unpleasant job of unblocking them.

Conclusions

- 7.513**
- Older girls were taken out of class in order to look after younger ones, which was unfair and disruptive to their education.
 - Requiring children from a young age to do chores was not in itself abusive, but chores became abusive because they were too onerous and were carried out under the threat of punishment.
 - The burden of domestic chores and bead making for older girls occupied so many hours that it excluded opportunities for recreation and personal time.

Food

- 7.514** Many of the complainants stated that they were constantly hungry in Goldenbridge and that the food was inadequate both in terms of quantity and quality.

Documentary evidence

- 7.515** The General Inspection Reports of the 1940s criticised the food and diet of the children; in particular, insufficient quantities of milk and butter were given during the war years. The Department of Education had allotted certain rations of milk and butter for children in industrial schools, and these quantities were not adhered to in Goldenbridge.

- 7.516** Dr McCabe visited the School in 1943 and, in her report dated 21st July 1943, she found that the 'diet could be more varied and ample'. Following a further inspection less than six months later, on 21st January 1944, Dr McCabe reported that the children were not receiving adequate supplies of milk and butter rations. Dripping was used as a substitute for butter.

- 7.517** This matter was taken up by the Department of Education's Inspector for Industrial and Reformatory Schools, who wrote to the Resident Manager, Sr Bianca, by letter dated 29th February 1944, calling upon her to remedy the situation. No reply was received and the Inspector wrote again on 17th April 1944. By letter dated 26th April 1944, Sr Bianca responded that Dr McCabe's suggestions had been put into effect 'as far as has been found practicable'. She reassured the Inspector that every effort was being made to increase the rations of milk and butter for the children.

- 7.518** An Inspector wrote back and indicated that, whilst he was pleased with the steps being taken by the Resident Manager to implement the Medical Inspector's recommendations, the milk and butter ration increases were, in his view, inadequate. In particular, he stated that each child was to receive one pint of milk per day and six ounces of butter each week. Sr Bianca responded on 4th May 1944 and stated that the rations would be increased as stipulated.

- 7.519** Dr McCabe visited the School again in June 1944. Once again, she noted her dissatisfaction at the children's milk and butter rations, which fell short of the quantities recommended by her:

I insist that children should get 1 pint per head per day also their butter ration. Dripping as a substitute cannot be considered.

- 7.520** Dr McCabe questioned Sr Bianca regarding the shortfall in rations and was informed that the School could not afford the stipulated amounts of butter and milk per child. The matter was again taken up by the Department of Education's Inspector in a letter dated 6th July 1944. He reiterated that:

It is essential that each child should receive a minimum of one pint of milk per day and I must request you to arrange for this without delay.

7.521 He insisted that dripping was not an adequate substitute for butter. In September 1944, Sr Bianca informed the Department that each child in the School was getting her ration of butter and one pint of milk per day.

7.522 In Dr McCabe's next inspection report of 1st March 1946, she noted that the diet of the children had improved, with the milk and butter rations increased as stipulated. In a medical inspection of the children in February and March 1946, Dr McCabe noted that approximately 100 children had not satisfactorily put on weight since the last visit. The explanation given was that most of these children had influenza. A failure to gain weight was a serious matter and, in other schools where this occurred, was seen as evidence of malnutrition. It would appear that the explanation offered in this case was accepted.

7.523 Sr Alida explained that, when she first arrived in Goldenbridge in 1942, the food was rationed. She confirmed that dripping was used instead of butter until 1954, when margarine was introduced. A churn of milk was delivered every morning from a local farm, which was sufficient to provide children with cocoa, tea and bottles of milk for the babies. She said that she was unaware of any correspondence from the Department of Education at that time concerning the inadequacies of the milk and butter rations for the children, as Sr Bianca would have dealt with such matters as Resident Manager.

7.524 Throughout the 1950s, the food and diet of the children was described as 'very good' by Dr McCabe. She spoke favourably of the food and diet when she inspected the School on two occasions in 1955. In particular, she stated that the meals 'were attractive, well cooked and attractively served'.

7.525 Dr McCabe retired in 1963, and Dr Lysaght inspected Goldenbridge on behalf of the Department in March 1966. He wrote a detailed report in which he noted that the children looked well nourished and healthy. He inspected the main meal of the day, which consisted of soup, milk, mincemeat, vegetables, custard and tinned pears, and he found that the amounts served were ample and well cooked.

7.526 The School was aware in advance of Dr McCabe's inspection, and ex-residents recalled that extra food was provided. Dr McCabe did not eat with the children, and based her report on observation of the food served on the day of her inspection.

7.527 Sr Alida stated that the Department inspectors did not examine or taste the food that was given to the children:

I cannot say that I ever saw an inspector with a spoon or anything tasting food, I cannot say I ever saw it.

7.528 The Inspector from the Department of Education always had her meal in the convent and not with the children in the dining room.

Evidence of complainants

7.529 The majority of the witnesses who testified to the Committee complained of hunger and inadequate food during their time in Goldenbridge. They spoke of constantly being hungry. The quality and quantity of the food that was provided was the subject of numerous complaints by the witnesses. They also talked about the difference in the quality of food which the lay staff received compared to the food given to the children; the food provided to the staff was far superior in quality.

- 7.530** A witness described the difference:
Oh yes. It was different, it was lovely to go in there, you could see what they were eating. They had a press with all kind of goodies in it ...
- 7.531** However, one witness stated that the food did improve after 1967, and she received 'lovely dinners' after that time.
- 7.532** One witness said: 'I remember being hungry all the time'.
- 7.533** Another said:
I was always hungry, but then I have always had a good appetite but I never felt full. The only time I felt full if you went out with your family and you got sweets and things like that.
- 7.534** Another said she was hungry, and explained:
Well, simply because we had so little to eat. I do remember all the girls used to eat, there were plants around a field, there was a hedge and we used to call them bread and butter plants. I remember that. We would eat the leaves off the hedges. Then from 4.30p.m. when we had supper which consisted of cocoa and bread and butter, that was it then, nothing else until breakfast the next morning.
- 7.535** One witness described the food as: 'basic. It was just bread and water or bread and tea and that was it'. He also complained of not receiving enough food:
... because when the food was put on the table it was grabbed so you were either fortunate or you weren't. A lot of the time I was unfortunate because I was very small anyway.
- 7.536** When asked about whether they ever got treats, another witness said:
We did eventually as time went on. There would be a nice cake on the table for Easter or something, yes there was, but that would have been maybe twice a year, maybe Christmas. Yes, there was sometimes some treats.
- 7.537** One witness described the effect of lack of food on her, 'I used to eat compulsively when I came out because I was hungry in Goldenbridge'.
- 7.538** As she had younger siblings, she gave her portion of food to them:
I used to often give my own food to the kids because they were forever hungry. I actually got a taste for eating wet muck because when I had a pain in my tummy I would eat that and it would take the pain away.
- 7.539** Another witness gave a similar account of the lack of food:
Oh, the food. Today I have a serious eating disorder and I believe, in my opinion and in the medical opinion it has stemmed from Goldenbridge. The food was pure slop, to be honest. It was like lumpy porridge in the morning and cocoa that was like dishwater, very thin and bad looking. The evening was – it wasn't porridge, it was bread and porridge. The meal at lunchtime was just like vegetables swimming in water. I don't recall much meat and I don't remember ever seeing a chicken.
- 7.540** She stated further:
The food was very bad, but I noticed that no matter what slop they were giving me, and I use the word slop because to be honest we had no choice, we ate it, we were hungry. I was constantly hungry.

7.541 Another complained of the constant hunger:

Yes, food food food. We dreamed about it. I think, if I recall, I even traded sweets. We were like little animals. We were like little dogs. We traded bits and bits and bits ... I stole. I stole sausages, I remember.

7.542 Another witness said:

There was never enough of it. It was only basics. Twelve slices of bread on the table, pre-buttered. Six at our tables, some tables would be bigger. You got two slices of bread and cocoa, and a cup of cocoa that's a fact. You would steal from anything, you would eat the crumbs. If you saw trays outside teacher's thing, if you got into the place at all, you would know that somebody got trays at certain times in the day, you would be dying to get hold of the trays to see if there was anything left over on it.

7.543 Another witness, who was in the School in the 1960s, painted a picture of the meals in the School:

... in the mornings we either had bread or porridge. Oh, the porridge. I know they had to make it for a lot of people but the lumps, we used to heave trying to eat it. You had to eat it, there was no way you would leave it on the plate. Dreadfully to say, sometimes you tried to flick it on to somebody else's table, it's a terrible thing to do but you did do that. I don't know what we were given for dinner. I know the potatoes were sour, not always sour but sometimes they smelled sour like sour milk. We had cabbage. I don't know what other vegetable we had because today I do love my food. I remember cabbage with these little tiny black flies that we used to pick out. You still had to eat it. The bread, I don't know what they did to the bread when you had breakfast time, but it used to have these hard lumps. The food, you had to eat it. There was no way you were ever going to leave it.

7.544 Another complainant, who spent four years in Goldenbridge from the early 1960s, stated that food served to the staff was very different to that served to the children. The cake crumbs, which the children scavenged, were leftovers from staff:

The crumbs – the crumbs and the bit of cakes would come from the teachers, there would be biscuits. It was a known fact that the teachers lived in the lap of luxury. They had proper food, they would have someone cooking, they would be called – they knew their time for tea. So when we would be doing the wash up in the dining room you would try and get into the kitchen into their room to see if you could grab anything off the table ... when they weren't looking. If you were caught with it in your mouth you would get a clatter.

Positive witnesses

7.545 Evidence was also heard, at the suggestion of the Sisters of Mercy, from a number of witnesses who had positive memories of their time in Goldenbridge. One of these witnesses was committed to Goldenbridge in 1947 and remained there for 10 years. She recalled that the standard and quantity of food improved when Sr Alida took over as Sister in Charge. She stated:

The food changed. We got extra food. We used to get afters, started giving us bread puddings and jelly and ice-cream and stuff. A little bit more food.

7.546 Another was asked whether she recalled being hungry, and she responded:

Not really, not starving anyway. When I heard somebody said they were starved, if you are starved it means that you don't get any food; if you are starving it just means that you are possibly hungry. But there were three meals, there was porridge in the morning time, there was your dinner with sweet, it could have been Carragheen moss. Maybe the day that somebody put the currants in the rice or put the cocoa in the rice and rice came out brown but if you were bloody well hungry you would eat it. Some of them stuck their nose up at it and said they couldn't eat it but if you were hungry you would eat it.

7.547 Another positive witness, who spent eight years in Goldenbridge from 1948, stated that the food was very basic. She recalled receiving half a slice of bread for breakfast along with a cup of cocoa. Dinner consisted of stew, casserole or shepherd's pie, and there was bread and cocoa again for tea. She accepted that she often felt hungry:

I suppose I felt I was hungry. We didn't do anything about it. I would have liked to have been able to have some more.

7.548 Another positive witness remained for three years as a carer after her discharge date and, although she had more positive memories of the food, she did not distinguish between the food she received as a pupil and the food she received as a carer.

Evidence of respondents

7.549 Sr Alida stated that bread was delivered every day except Sunday, and they had brack at the weekend. She recalled that the children got porridge, bread and butter for breakfast; dinner consisted of sausages, black and white pudding, or rabbit or mincemeat with vegetables. They had dessert every day, which usually consisted of a milk pudding. Vegetables were grown in the garden but, as it did not produce enough quantities, they were also purchased from the market every week. She accepted that, because the food was cooked for such large numbers, the quality of the food was affected.

7.550 Sr Alida stated that the children had snacks between meals. Crates of fruit such as apples and oranges were purchased from the market on a weekly basis. She bought boiled sweets in bulk from a wholesale shop on Capel Street and broken Club Milk chocolate bars from Jacobs factory.

7.551 None of the witnesses, even the positive witnesses, could recall anything like this type of food in Goldenbridge.

7.552 Sr Bianca and later Sr Alida, when she took over as Sister in Charge, had their meals in the convent. The only meal they supervised in the Industrial School was dinner. Towards the latter stages of her management, Sr Alida recalled buying delph and cutlery in bulk and, by the time she left Goldenbridge, there was no broken tableware in use. She also recalled the kitchen facilities being up-graded with the addition of a gas cooker, toaster and deep fat fryer. She confirmed that there were no set menus during her time in Goldenbridge.

7.553 Sr Alida said she never received complaints from the Inspector about the children's food and diet.

7.554 Sr Alida denied that scraps were thrown to the children in the yard, as alleged by some complainants. She added that, while she was in charge, no child would have been so hungry that she would have had to pick scraps of food from the ground.

7.555 Sr Alida asserted that:

one thing I cannot be challenged with is neglecting the food of the children or their clothes. Most certainly I never neglected – I would have said that from '54 onwards the quality of food, cooking equipment, clothing etc., that I did my utmost to give them the best and they got it.

7.556 In a statement made to the Investigation Committee Sr Alida stated:

I believe the children could have eaten more but they certainly did not go hungry.

7.557 Sr Gianna recalled accompanying Sr Alida to the market to buy trays of apples and oranges. Sr Alida recalled that there was dessert every day after dinner, which consisted of tapioca, corn flour, rice or jelly.

Evidence of the Sisters of Mercy

7.558 The Sisters of Mercy denied that children were starving or malnourished in Goldenbridge. They conceded as a matter of probability that the quality of the food in the School during the 1940s was relatively poor, due to the war years and rationing in society generally. However, they asserted that the food and diet improved considerably during the period under review.

7.559 The children were served with four meals a day, which were simple and adequate. They submitted that approximately 30 percent of the capitation grant was spent on food.

7.560 In response to allegations by complainants of constant hunger, they stated that:

food was not available between meals and this might have given rise to a sense of being hungry.

7.561 They also stated that the:

more extreme allegations concerning inadequate food for the children are not accepted.

Conclusions

7.562 • **Children were often hungry in Goldenbridge. The food was insufficient and of poor quality. Although improvements were made from time to time, the diet was never more than adequate.**

Clothing

7.563 The Sisters of Mercy stated that clothing was an area 'where considerable improvements were made throughout the period under review'.

7.564 This would appear to be confirmed by the inspection reports from 1952 onwards. Before that, Dr McCabe was critical of the clothing of the children. Following an inspection in 1944, the Department of Education wrote to the Resident Manager requesting her to implement Dr McCabe's suggestions, which included improving the cleanliness and tidiness among the children. Sr Bianca replied by letter and stated:

We find it increasingly difficult to provide suitable clothing for the children and in many cases have to be satisfied with patching their old garments, but every effort is being made to secure personal cleanliness and neatness amongst them.

7.565 In a further letter of 15th June 1944 to the Department, Sr Bianca conceded that they could not properly clothe the children, but cited the inadequacy of the capitation grant as the cause:

Having used all possible means to economise in food and clothing we find ourselves totally unable to meet the demands of our creditors. We owe large sums of money for clothing and the present maintenance allowance only suffices to feed the children, leaving no margin for clothing, so that we have no hope of being able to pay our debts on the present grant.

7.566 On 28th June 1945, Dr McCabe noted that the clothing was 'fair' but 'could be improved'. No further information is provided regarding how the clothes could be improved or the problem with them. The following year on 1st March 1946, she again described the clothes as 'fair' but added that they were 'to be improved now that stocks are more easily obtained'. The Department of Education's Inspector wrote to Sr Bianca on 22nd March 1946 on foot of Dr McCabe's inspection, stating:

It is observed that the children's clothing is not as good as it should be and it is hoped that with the supply position becoming easier, steps will be taken to make the necessary improvement in this matter.

7.567 By 1948, the clothing had improved. Dr McCabe described it as 'good'. The same description was given following her visits in 1949 and 1951. From 1952 onwards, Dr McCabe reported that the clothes were 'very good'. In her General Inspection Report of May 1955, she provided more detail on the quality of the clothing, stating:

Brightly coloured attractive hand knit jumpers and skirts ... children very well groomed.

7.568 Dr McCabe did use the term 'very good' in her Inspection Reports to describe clothing from 1956.

7.569 Dr Lysaght, when he took over from Dr McCabe, commented in his report of 21st March 1966 that the clothes were 'good and sufficient'. From then on until the closure of the School, the clothing of the children was not an issue.

7.570 Sr Alida in her evidence revealed the nature and quality of the clothing of the children when she first arrived in Goldenbridge:

The clothes were all handmade at that time, there wasn't a single garment that was bought. Skirts were made, nightdresses made and they were very basic altogether, the clothes were ... made from grey flannelette mainly.

7.571 She confirmed that clothes were handed down from child to child:

... They were passed down along the line. They lasted a long time. The nightdresses were grey flannelette mostly ... and those things had a long life compared with the garments we are wearing today, so there wasn't much new bought or many new clothes.

7.572 She acknowledged, however, that the clothing improved gradually from the time when she arrived:

the poverty stricken look that was in Goldenbridge when I went there changed gradually, everything changed bit by bit. The clothes improved ...

7.573 When Sr Alida was asked whether she was aiming to get the children good clothing that wouldn't mark them out as institutionalised, and whether she dressed the children up nicely on specific occasions, she replied:

What we had in the early days was certainly institutional gear. There has been complaints that the children were dressed up for occasions. I will be quite honest that the children were dressed up ... because there were visitors.

7.574 Sr Gianna, who worked in the School in the early 1960s, had a very positive opinion of the clothing situation, and stated that:

My first impression when I came to the School was that the children had just beautiful clothes. I would also remember the Sisters in the convent, the children used to come up on a Sunday for Mass and a lot of the Sisters would make comment about how lovely they looked. They always had lovely white socks up to her knees, in the summer short white socks. They might have black patent shoes. They had lovely pleated skirts and none of them were the same, they were all different types of checks or plaids. They had nice coloured jumpers, different types of jumpers. I would have always seen them as very well clad.

Evidence of complainants

7.575 Several of the witnesses complained that, when they first arrived in the School, their clothes were taken off them. One witness recalled being given clothes by people who took her out of Goldenbridge on holidays:

Once you gave them up for the wash you mightn't see them again.

7.576 She specifically remembered that her '*... confirmation dress was sent over from England. I wore it on my confirmation day, I never saw it again. I can still see it now, it was a red and white dress*'.

7.577 One witness described her distress when she decided not to go to her mother's funeral due to the nature and quality of her clothing:

Immediately I could see that we would stand out. We were looking different to other people. We had these institutional haircuts, up here somewhere, cut like a bowl around your head, and I was going to be dressed what I'd like to call urchin ... Disgusting clothes. That's not what I wore when I went out at the weekend to be with my father. I wore clothes he bought for me.

7.578 Another witness stated that, when she attended secretarial college while at Goldenbridge, she felt out of place due to her appearance and clothing:

When you went to that place I was about 14 and a half and all these girls coming in, I am not vain, I don't go by appearances but my clothes were raggy compared to the young women that were going there.

7.579 This sentiment was echoed by a complainant who remembered how their clothing labelled them:

... we were labelled, we had it here, institution, Goldenbridge ... it was the way we walked, talking about walking. It was the clothes we wore. We tried to be fashionable and were big frumps.

7.580 Another witness was extremely critical of the changes of clothing and the clothing in general:

There was very little changing of clothing. I think I wore – I know when I went in first we wore like what they wear in Dickens's days, the pinafore. That was left on us for months and months and months, we didn't change that.

7.581 Some witnesses had positive comments to make about the clothes. One such witness remembered wearing nice jumpers and good clothes on Sundays:

We had jumpers, we had Sunday jumpers, red jumpers. I am sure they were red. They were good jumpers for when you are going outside, going with a lady, you had your good clothes on.

7.582 Another said:

... What was very good every year in the summer Sr Venetia would get all new clothes and they were put away for us ...

7.583 Another witness pointed out that Sr Alida looked after the girls before they left, providing them with new clothes:

Say when you were 16 and you left, you always left with new clothes. She made sure you had a new – everything was new and you had a case; but if you left before you were 16 you wouldn't get as much but once you left at 16 you were rigged out from head to toe.

Conclusion

- 7.584** The children in Goldenbridge were conscious of their institutionalised appearance, and this contributed to the feeling of inferiority recalled by so many. However, clothing was adequate and, in particular, efforts were made to provide girls with proper clothes when they left the Institution.

Aftercare

- 7.585** Aftercare did not feature prominently in the testimony of witnesses before the Committee. The Sisters appeared to be able to find positions for most of the girls when they left at 16 years of age. Until the mid-1960s, almost all the girls entered domestic service, and this was the only industrial training they received. From the early 1960s, some girls were given the opportunity of attending secretarial college and training as children's nurses. These girls were also found jobs when they left.
- 7.586** Of more concern to witnesses was the lack of any preparation for dealing with the world and, in particular, the lack of any knowledge of relationships with men. Witnesses spoke of how extremely vulnerable they were on leaving the Institution. Even the circumstance of their leaving was handled in an insensitive way, according to many complainants.
- 7.587** For most complainants, the day of discharge was the day immediately prior to their 16th birthday. For many, although they knew this was the case, the actual discharge event appeared to be sudden and unexpected. They spoke about being completely unprepared for this and of receiving very little encouragement or support from Sr Venetia as they left what was, after all, their childhood home. One complainant recalled being terrified when she was told she was leaving Goldenbridge.
- 7.588** Another complainant said that every day in Goldenbridge she used to imagine walking through the gates and leaving it. When the day came that she was going home, she was petrified. She recalled being brought into a room in Goldenbridge and being told by Sr Alida that she was going:

She gave me a pair of rosary beads and I left terrified, you would never believe ... I went back to my grandmother's from Goldenbridge. I didn't know how to speak properly. We spoke our own language, I know that you will find that strange. We were only children, we didn't grow up. We spoke differently to each other. If you were brought up for nine years in a home you all speak the same, you all speak the same language, I spoke this language. I was terrified of people. I walked, I had a stoop, my shoulders were bent ... I would not look at nobody. I would not look in your eyes, I couldn't. I was afraid ... I was afraid of everything and everybody ... I didn't know how to survive out there, this was a new world this was something.

- 7.589** She said that she did not feel normal when she left Goldenbridge, that she always felt bad, and she felt people were looking at her. She had no confidence and that, even now at 62 years of age, 'I will never have confidence because Goldenbridge took everything, everything from me as a child, everything, my childhood, everything'.
- 7.590** This complainant said repeatedly that she was stupid and that she looked stupid, and she said that most of the children who left Goldenbridge looked stupid. She said that she was treated as a 'bastard' in Goldenbridge.

Conclusions

- 7.591**
- **Although girls were placed in jobs when they left Goldenbridge they were isolated and vulnerable in the outside world because they were ill-prepared for it and many had feelings of inferiority.**

- One of the reasons why girls were unprepared was the unworldliness of the nuns. The inadequacy of the preparation should have been addressed by the nuns in order to give the girls as much of a chance as possible in their adult life.

General conclusions

- 7.592
1. Life in Goldenbridge was full of drudgery. Children went from chores to the classroom to bead making without respite until bead making was discontinued in the mid-1960s. Staffing levels were poor, and children had to do a great deal of domestic chores.
 2. Punishment in Goldenbridge was pervasive. Children were beaten for small infringements. It was unpredictable, arbitrary and led to a climate of fear, although after the 1960s it decreased significantly.
 3. Goldenbridge was a closed institution with little or no contact with the outside world, and children became institutionalised as a result and suffered in many ways when they left.
 4. Girls who were incapable of making their way in the outside world were kept on as carers, despite being wholly unsuitable. They treated children brutally and were able to do so without any control by the Sisters in charge.
 5. Activities which need not have been abusive became so when excessive demands were placed on the children and fear of punishment was constant.
 6. Some children were treated less harshly because they had relatives to look out for them.
 7. There were no internal controls by the Congregation. Much of what was learned about the Christian Brothers' industrial schools came from their own Visitation Reports but there was no such system in Goldenbridge. The Carysfort Mother House appeared to offer no guidance or supervision whatsoever and even the nuns in the Goldenbridge convent adopted a 'hands off' approach.
 8. The regime in Goldenbridge, which was flawed from the outset, did not change for 30 years. The Congregation did not learn from its experience of childcare. Other Orders, such as the Sisters of Charity, identified the need to rethink the system of large institutions caring for large numbers of children. The Sisters of Mercy have lamented the lack of any childcare training in the State, but organisations entrusted with the care of children could have developed training programmes for their members. The Congregation had the experience of childcare but failed to develop expertise.
 9. The regime became kinder and more child-centred in the late 1960s and the number of complainants was small, which suggests that even though Goldenbridge was still a large, crowded institution, better management could have an important bearing on the quality of life of the children.
 10. The Sisters in charge during the relevant period were harsh and unfeeling towards the children. Humiliation and degradation were constant occurrences, both from the Sisters and from the lay staff. The children felt that no one cared for them and that they did not matter. Even the members of the Congregation who spoke to the Committee failed to appreciate that Goldenbridge was abusive because of the attitude of the Sisters who ran it. Hard work and dedication were no excuses for a regime that made children feel despised and worthless.
 11. The Department of Education inspections observed some problems but missed others. The Inspector did address the issues of food and clothing in the 1940s but, once these obvious problems were solved, the inspector did not report other, real problems of Goldenbridge, including the excessive chores, the pressures of bead making and the emotional deprivation. These problems could have been discovered by speaking to the children.