

Chapter 14

St Joseph's Industrial School, Kilkenny, 1873–1999

Brief history of the School

- 14.01** The Sisters of Charity were approached by the Bishop of Ossory, Dr Moran, in 1872 and asked 'to care for the little homeless girls of the poor'. They had been a presence in Kilkenny since 1861, caring for the sick in fever and work house hospitals and prisons.
- 14.02** A site was purchased on the Waterford Road, and the Sisters moved into a large cottage on the grounds. In September 1873, a new building comprising a convent, school and chapel was opened. The School was certified on 22nd March 1873 for the reception of 126 girls, of whom 100 were chargeable. This was increased to 130 in 1950.
- 14.03** The School was transferred to the South Eastern Health Board on 6th April 1999. At that time, there were 10 children in care in two houses, Avondale and Crannog. Avondale was purchased by the Sisters of Charity in 1976, and leased to the South Eastern Health Board in 1999, and later transferred to them under the Redress Scheme. The other home, Crannog, was built by the Sisters of Charity with funds raised locally and through an exchange of land between the Sisters and the County Manager. In 1995, an adjoining house was purchased by the South Eastern Health Board, and the two houses then formed one unit. The original house was transferred, free of charge, to the South Eastern Health Board in 1999.
- 14.04** The Sisters of Charity provided a detailed description of all improvements, changes and adaptations made to the buildings and grounds between 1876 and 1984, which appears at Appendix 1.
- 14.05** The photograph of the convent and part of the Industrial School:



The children

- 14.06** During the period under review, 1,900 children passed through St Joseph's, Kilkenny. Most of the children were committed through the courts in the earlier years, and the majority came from the counties Kilkenny, Tipperary, Dublin, Laois and Carlow in the period 1933 to 1966.
- 14.07** The Sisters of Charity also managed an industrial school for young boys known as St Patrick's Industrial School in Kilkenny. It operated from 1879 to 1966. Between the period 1933 and 1966, the records of the Sisters show that 127 girls in St Joseph's had brothers in St Patrick's at the same time.
- 14.08** The children admitted to Kilkenny were very young. Between 1933 and 1966, 221 of the children admitted were under five years of age; 234 were aged between five and 10; and only 101 were over 10 on admission. The proportion of very young children increased between 1966 and 1999: 362 children under five years of age were admitted, and 261 were under 10; only 112 children were over 10 on admission.

Sisters and staff working in the Industrial School

- 14.09** There were 18 Resident Managers in St Joseph's during the relevant period. In most cases, the Resident Manager was also the Local Superior. A number of Sisters from the Community were involved in the School, and a small number of lay staff worked in the School in teaching, farming and laundry.

Sources

- 14.10** The sources of information were:
- the evidence of former pupils;
 - the evidence of staff members;
 - the evidence of respondents; and
 - the records in relation to the School which were furnished to the Commission on foot of discovery directions to the Department of Education, Sisters of Charity, Diocese of Ossory and An Garda Síochána.

The period 1933 to 1952

- 14.11** In the first record of a General Inspection dated 22nd April 1939, Dr Anna McCabe visited the School and was approving. The children looked happy and content, were well clothed and fed, and she was impressed with the large amount of home preserves that were used.
- 14.12** The next record of a general inspection was 9th December 1943, over four years later, and, although it recorded a previous inspection in November 1942, no note or record of her findings in 1942 have survived. She described the School as well conducted, clean and well kept. Food and diet were described as satisfactory, and clothing as fairly good. There was no fire escape, but fire drill was practised regularly and there were six ladders available for escape from the building, which was not too high. On 23rd February 1943, 35 children had perished in a fire in Cavan Industrial School, and fire safety was high on the agenda of the Inspector at this time.
- 14.13** On 4th July 1944, Dr McCabe paid another visit to the School and found a generally well conducted school. She did not think the children were getting an adequate supply of milk and butter and insisted that it should be increased. She was still concerned about the lack of fire escapes, and wrote in detail about the dangers for the children in the dormitories, particularly the one situated

over the domestic economy kitchen, where a fire could start. Dr McCabe found the children's health to be good on this visit.

- 14.14** Following this inspection, by letter dated 5th August 1944, the Department Inspector wrote to the Resident Manager and requested that each child should receive a minimum of one pint of milk per day, together with the full amount of butter ration allowed by the Department of Supplies.
- 14.15** Because of the tragedy in Cavan, the Department was very concerned that all children could be safely evacuated in the event of a fire. The Inspector expressed the Minister's grave concern that there was only one exit from a dormitory accommodating 21 children, which led to another dormitory accommodating 57 children, which in turn had two exits close together leading to the same corridor. It was evident to him that children in all of these dormitories would be trapped in the event of the corridor filling with heavy smoke. He requested that the Resident Manager immediately set about providing an adequate fire escape.
- 14.16** The Resident Manager responded, by letter dated 7th September 1944, that the children's diet had been adjusted, and she was working in conjunction with the Resident Manager in the nearby St Patrick's Industrial School, Kilkenny to resolve the fire escape problem and, by March 1945, the Inspector was able to report that the fire escape was in place.
- 14.17** In her inspection report dated 15th March 1945, Dr McCabe described the newly appointed Resident Manager, Sr Irma,¹ as excellent. She noted a nurse had been appointed to take charge of the younger children and thought it was a step in the right direction.
- 14.18** For the next 10 years, Dr McCabe visited St Joseph's, Kilkenny on an annual basis. Her reports about the School indicated an exceptionally high level of satisfaction with all aspects, and she was particularly enthusiastic about the Resident Manager, whom she described as very capable and someone who had added much to the School. A very efficient nursery was established for the very small children and added much to their comfort.
- 14.19** Two witnesses, who were resident in the Industrial School in the mid to late 1940s, gave evidence. The witnesses were siblings who were placed in care after the death of their mother. This was a period during which St Joseph's was still operating as a traditional industrial school.
- 14.20** Although both witnesses experienced feelings of rejection at being placed in care, they were also aggrieved at what happened to them whilst in St Joseph's. They described the upset at being separated from their brothers who were placed in another industrial school.
- 14.21** They both described Sr Elvira,² who was a school teacher, as being particularly nasty and cruel. They said that she punished children for no apparent reason and also locked them in a cupboard without food or drink until late at night. This Sister left in the mid-1940s, and one of the witnesses said that things improved following her departure.
- 14.22** Both witnesses told of lay staff who were former pupils and who were left in charge of the children. One lay staff member was described as particularly nasty and is alleged to have kicked and beaten the children.
- 14.23** They also recalled the daily routine in the School, which involved getting up early in the morning, attending Mass, followed by breakfast and doing chores, which involved a lot of scrubbing and polishing.

¹ This is a pseudonym.

² This is a pseudonym.

- 14.24** It is clear from the annals of the Sisters of Charity that, from the mid-1940s, they were aware of the limitations of industrial school life on the development of the children. They saw that the restrictions placed on nuns by their profession narrowed their social contacts, and this affected the children who left the industrial schools 'knowing nobody and knowing nothing of the ordinary etiquette of social life'.
- 14.25** Change began with the appointment in 1944 of the new Superior who was praised by Dr McCabe. Sr Irma was trained in child psychology and believed that the children should be encouraged to treat St Joseph's as their home, given more freedom and trusted to go out alone.
- 14.26** These reflections by the Congregation on their own mission, together with the publication of the Cussen Report in Ireland and the Curtis Report in England, prompted the Sisters to draw up a five-year plan to implement change.
- 14.27** Among the changes were:
- Children were to be given much more freedom.
 - Regimentation was to be abandoned, and the children were to be trusted and treated as individuals.
 - There was to be more careful and sympathetic supervision by the Sisters, and they were to be encouraged to use their imagination with the children.
 - Children were to be allowed out in small groups of two's and three's to replace the 'dreary crocodile to shop with their pocket money, to go walking and on picnics and holiday excursions'.
 - Efforts were to be made to keep siblings together, and children from the same family were to be given a table to themselves in the refectory.
 - A new nursery unit was to be built.
- 14.28** Following the publication of the Curtis Report in 1946, a childcare course was set up in London by the Sisters of the Holy Child. The course was of one year's duration. Initially, two Sisters of Charity took the course and, subsequently, 10 Sisters completed their training in residential care of children in the 1940s. Thirty more Sisters attended short courses in the early 1950s. Also, in the 1950s, a number of Sisters were sent by Sr Irma to train in the English Child Psychology Course. The annals note that this experience 'has changed the whole attitude to the treatment of Industrial School children'.
- 14.29** In 1952, the word 'Institution' was dropped, and the School was officially known as 'Girls Industrial School' and thereafter always referred to as St Joseph's Girls' School. The premises were remodelled to provide for groups, and the large group of 130 children was broken into three smaller groups of 30, providing for children between seven and 16. These groups were given Saints' names, but in fact became known as 'sets', distinguished by different colours: red, green and blue. The younger children formed a fourth group, the nursery group.
- 14.30** Each group had its own sitting room and separate dining room which were newly painted and decorated. From 1953, the children from fourth class upwards attended outside schools, and the annals for that year remarked:
- This gives them the opportunity of mixing with children who have their own homes – in this way they hear something about home life.
- 14.31** By 1954, the School was grouped into four self-sufficient units, and Dr McCabe in her report of that year noted that the residents were mixing with children from outside at recreation and school. She felt they were much happier and lived a more normal existence. The Sisters were also very

enthusiastic about the changes brought about in the children as a result of the new system, and this was noted in Dr McCabe's report dated 14th September 1954.

14.32 The group home system was recommended by the Kennedy Report in 1970, and many institutions were thereafter obliged to close or adopt the group home system. By that time, the Sisters of Charity had been operating a group system for almost 20 years, thanks largely to the vision of Sr Irma.

- 14.33**
- **At an early stage the Sisters of Charity identified the fundamental flaws of the system of large-scale institutional care for young children.**
 - **They also recognised the difficulties that those who took religious vows encountered in meeting the social and emotional needs of children.**
 - **From the late 1940s the Sisters of Charity sent their members abroad for training in childcare and child psychology. They applied this training to their childcare practices in Ireland, to the great benefit of the children under their care.**

Sexual abuse incident of 1954

14.34 On 25th October 1954, the new Resident Manager, Sr Tova,³ wrote to the Department of Education asking them to give her immediate permission to transfer two girls. She described both of them as not fit to be with younger children, owing to their immoral conduct and bad influence. She wrote:

Already they have taught – them sinful sexual acts, that makes it expedient to dismiss them from this school immediately.

14.35 The Department informed Dr McCabe about the application, and she left immediately for Kilkenny to conduct a general inspection.

14.36 She spent two days there and, in her General Inspection, she reported in the usual glowing terms with regard to the condition of the School and the facilities for the children. Under the heading 'General Observations and Suggestions', she wrote, 'I had a long discussion with Resident Manager regarding this school'.

14.37 Dr McCabe made no further comment in that document as to what they discussed.

14.38 In a separate 10-page hand-written report signed and dated 1st November 1954, Dr McCabe gave a very detailed account of the investigation she carried out. This revealed that a painter, Mr Jacobs,⁴ who had been in the employ of the Sisters for a period of 30 years, had sexually abused some of the girls. Dr McCabe's report was a revelation in what it disclosed about St Joseph's and attitudes to sexual abuse of children at that time.

14.39 Dr McCabe's report began with an account of her conversation with the Resident Manager, who had identified two girls, one aged 15 and the other aged 13, as having 'corrupted the whole school'. Dr McCabe reported:

Apparently the girls had got into each others beds and had invited other children into their beds and have "behaved immorally" with them. Also the Resident Manager informed me that other children in the school were also engaging in immoral practices and she named several girls.

³ This is a pseudonym.

⁴ This is a pseudonym.

14.40 Dr McCabe listed 11 children, one of whom was only eight years of age. Three of the children were 10 years old, two were 11, two were 12, and three were 13 years old. One child's age was not mentioned. One 10-year-old was described as having '... indulged in immoral practices with another young child'. The eight year old 'knew a lot' as she had been associating with boys and girls before admission. Generally, these children were described as 'associating with' other children and being up to 'immoral practises'. One 13-year-old, who had already been transferred to Limerick Reformatory, was described as 'a very bad type'.

14.41 Dr McCabe acted promptly and appropriately. She reported:

I asked the Resident Manager to round up all the children she suspected or knew to be behaving badly and I told her I would interview each child separately and also that she was to institute "one way traffic" so that they could not compare notes.

14.42 Dr McCabe's account of her interviews indicates that she approached the children in a friendly, non-threatening manner. The little girls agreed that they had got into each other's beds but did not admit any serious misconduct. One 12-year-old, however, was more forthcoming:

I questioned xx and told her I had heard she was a naughty girl and had been behaving badly in the school, pulling up skirts and getting into one another's beds. She said she had done these things and I said to her "now isn't that a silly way to behave" and she agreed it was and that she would not do so again. I asked her who had taught her these tricks and she told me she had learned them in the school.

14.43 Dr McCabe continued to question the child and asked her whether anyone had pulled down her knickers. She said her mother had done it once to punish her, and then she said Mr Jacobs had done it to her. The girl then gave Dr McCabe a detailed description of what ensued, the particulars of which need not be included in this report. It is sufficient to say that the story told by the child showed that the behaviour of the employee was not a casual or chance encounter, but was the result of careful preparation by a calculating child abuser. The innocence of the child in sexual matters was apparent from her account.

14.44 Dr McCabe then questioned the two girls mentioned. They both described very similar conduct by Mr Jacobs. One child said that she had told Sr Stella⁵ 'who put her to bed and shut the door'.

14.45 Dr McCabe then asked the Resident Manager about Mr Jacobs and was told that he was 'a marvellous man and the mainstay of the Institution', who had been employed by 'Four Reverend Mothers' over a period of 30 years. He was a married man with a large family.

14.46 Dr McCabe told the Resident Manager about the child [BB] who had reported the matter to Sr Stella:

The Resident Manager told me that she was on holidays when that had happened but on her return she heard all about it but was inclined to disbelieve it "as these children are all so well informed before they come into the school and often tell a lot of lies that it is difficult to believe them". When I mentioned XX and AA she was really shocked.

I asked her why when she had heard about BB why she had not informed the Department and ask them to investigate the matter. She told me really she thought the child was imagining it.

14.47 A different account appeared in a statement prepared by the Sister in question, Sr Stella, which was taken after Dr McCabe's investigations. She said that she observed a child in tears after coming from the School where Mr Jacobs had given her sweets. According to this account, the

⁵ This is a pseudonym.

Sister asked the child whether anything had happened in the School, and the child said no, that she had only gone in to Mr Jacobs for sweets.

14.48 There was no explanation offered for the account given by Sr Tova to Dr McCabe, which corroborated the child's story that she had told Sr Stella what had happened.

14.49 Dr McCabe asked to interview the two girls for whom the application to transfer was made, and she interviewed the older of the two, who was almost 16 years old and who was working in the laundry to keep her away from the other children. She could not elicit any information from her.

14.50 Dr McCabe then discovered that the Resident Manager had already transferred the second girl to a reformatory in Limerick. This child had told one of the Sisters that her uncles had been interfering with her before she had come to St Joseph's. In an account of this, the nun in question stated:

Then I discovered that for two years prior to her coming here she had on countless occasions indulged in sexuality with her two uncles and with other boys. We got none of those details about her when she was being committed to the school. I reported the matter immediately to Mother Vera⁶ who took action.

14.51 This was the child who had been described as a 'bad type'. The Reverend Mother had telephoned the Good Shepherd Convent, a girls' reformatory in Limerick, and had asked that the child be taken immediately. Dr McCabe advised the Resident Manager that what she had done was illegal and she had no authority to transfer the child without Departmental permission.

14.52 On receipt of Dr McCabe's report, a number of Department officials met and made the following proposals:

- (1) Dr McCabe was asked to visit Kilkenny and confer with the local parish priest or administrator who might wish to bring it to the attention of the Bishop.
- (2) The Resident Manager was to be advised to dispense with the services of the painter with least possible delay.
- (3) To advise the Resident Manager to immediately request the return of the child who had been transferred to St Joseph's in Limerick without sanction.

14.53 The memorandum setting out these proposals went on to state:

When these matters were dealt with and a further report from Dr McCabe received after her interview with the ecclesiastical authorities, the question of the transfer or the disposal otherwise of the two girls can be considered.

14.54 Statements were taken from three of the Sisters in charge of the group about the type of immoral conduct they observed over the period leading up to the investigation by Dr McCabe in November 1954. It appeared that, over a period of six months, these Sisters had noticed changes in the behaviour of some of the children. In May 1954, one Sister had observed some of the little children out of their beds at night without their night dresses on. The instigator appeared to be an 'older' child, who was eight years old. She reported the matter to her superiors and to a priest. The children were punished, and were given stern lectures, and matters appeared to settle down in that dormitory.

14.55 Nothing further happened until the next August, when she discovered two children had been sleeping together and, a fortnight later, heard a child refer to two girls 'going out with each other'. At this point, she questioned the children closely, and discovered that one of the children had been sexually abused by her uncles before coming to St Joseph's.

⁶ This is a pseudonym.

14.56 Sr Tova then took up the story. She said that, as soon as she discovered the child's sexual history, she arranged for two Sisters to accompany her to Limerick, and wrote to the Department for sanction for that transfer, and for the transfer of an older girl to St Anne's, Kilmacud. This precipitated Dr McCabe's investigation and the revelations about Mr Jacobs, which she confirmed came as a great shock, as he had been working in the School for 30 years and 'no-one had ever suspected him'.

14.57 When speaking to Sr Tova, Dr McCabe dismissed the behaviour of the other children as childish playing and did not think it merited any further action. The Sisters, however, wanted all the children concerned transferred out of St Joseph's. A few days after Dr McCabe's visit, one of the children was found 'doing an immoral act in the playground before young children', and this confirmed the Sisters in their view that all of the children involved should be transferred out of St Joseph's.

14.58 A meeting was held on 5th November 1954 attended by Mother General, the Reverend Mother, Dr McCabe and the Assistant Secretary to the Department. From the account of this meeting, it would appear to have been a damage limitation exercise on the part of the Sisters.

14.59 The Mother General and the Reverend Mother informed the meeting that they were satisfied that, apart from the Jacobs affair, things were not as bad as originally thought. The matter had been brought under control by the removal of certain girls, diligence on the part of the Sisters, and the fact that, as a result of the group system, the 'evil had not extended beyond a single group'. They also said that 'the affair in which XX had been concerned with Mr Jacobs had occurred in the summer of 1953 and not, as had first been thought, during last summer'.

14.60 In a complete contradiction of what had been reported by Dr McCabe, the Sisters then said that Sr Stella had not been informed that relations with Mr Jacobs 'had gone beyond him giving her sweets'. The Sisters accepted that Sr Stella should have had her suspicions aroused when she discovered the young girl in tears so soon after being given sweets by Mr Jacobs.

14.61 The meeting was then joined by the local parish priest, Fr Curran.⁷ He had read Dr McCabe's report. He attempted to make light of what had happened, asserting that 'the happenings concerned were such as frequently occur in girls' schools throughout the country'. The account of the meeting stated:

We did not accept this view, and on Dr McCabe's pointing out that a peculiar vicious aspect of Jacobs depravity was that he had entered upon his misdeeds with malice aforethought, Fr Curran admitted the heinousness of Jacobs offences, but continued to make light of the misconduct of the girls amongst themselves. It had become evident that Fr Curran's stand was to prevail upon the Department not to take steps that would bring Jacobs into Court. On the Assistant Secretary enquiring further in this regard, Fr Curran stated plainly that he would appeal to the Dept not to take any measures with regard to Jacobs.

14.62 He appealed to the Department on the grounds that, although Jacobs deserved penal servitude, the court case would bring the convent into great disrepute, and the children involved would have to give evidence, and this would do them immense harm. Mr Jacobs had been dismissed immediately following Dr McCabe's disclosure:

The Reverend Mother here confirmed that she had paid Jacobs and dismissed him, on that day, but without giving him any reason ... Jacobs had, she said, received his dismissal in silence.

⁷ This is a pseudonym.

- 14.63** When the suggestion was made by the Department that the Bishop should be informed, Fr Curran was strongly opposed to this move, as his Lordship was old and deaf and the affair would upset him. He agreed to accept full responsibility for this decision, should the Bishop ever learn of the affair. He undertook also to interview Mr Jacobs and intimate to him that he was not yet out of the woods, and that everything would depend on his future conduct. He said he would, 'Put the fear of God into Jacobs'.
- 14.64** The Department officials were impressed with Fr Curran:
- Fr Curran is obviously a very sensible and shrewd pastor and on consideration for his years we felt that a visit on our part to the Bishop was not called for. We agree also to recommend that no steps be taken towards a prosecution of Jacobs.
- 14.65** The meeting then had to decide how to deal with the children involved. The whole matter had originally come to light because of a request for a transfer of two children because of immoral behaviour. It was decided that these two children, together with a third girl, should be removed – two to their families, and one to St Anne's Reformatory in Kilmacud. It was felt by the Sisters that, with the 'ring leaders' gone, the rest of the children would forget the episode, although strict supervision would now be necessary, particularly during meal times.
- 14.66** The Reverend Mother then called in the four Sisters who had charge of the children and, in the presence of Dr McCabe and the Assistant Secretary, she praised their devotion but advised them and, in particular, Sr Stella that they needed to be much more vigilant and enquiring when it came to the children.
- 14.67** The Departmental officials recommended a course of action to the Department. By letter dated 10th November, the Resident Manager was notified that one girl could be transferred to Kilmacud Reformatory and two others returned to their parents and grandparents.
- 14.68** On 28th November 1954, the Mother General of the Congregation wrote to the Assistant Secretary of the Department to thank him for his kindness:
- I shall never forget your kindness during your visit to Kilkenny, and you may count on my poor prayers. Please God, the unpleasant affair is closed forever and we shall hope that there shall never be a repetition.
- 14.69** The matter of the children abused by Mr Jacobs was not addressed by that meeting. The Resident Manager continued to correspond with the Department about the four girls who had been identified as having been abused by Jacobs, in order to have them transferred from the School, in the interests of the other children. She wrote two days after the meeting:
- The other three children ... have still fresh in their memory the experience they had with Mr Jacobs in 1953. They also know about each other's contact with him, which shows they must have and probably still are discussing this matter among themselves.
- 14.70** It does not appear from the records that the permission was granted, as three of their names appear seven months later in a report to the Chief Inspector by Dr McCabe dated 22nd June 1955. The Reverend Mother General had asked Dr McCabe to meet her in Milltown in Dublin, at the headquarters of the Congregation in Ireland, to discuss the situation in Kilkenny where, once again, she was concerned about the behaviour of six of the girls. These six girls were aged between 9 and 13, and two of them had revealed to Dr McCabe the previous November that they had been sexually abused by Mr Jacobs. They were now seen as a corrupting influence on the rest of the children, particularly their own siblings in the School. The Reverend Mother told Dr McCabe that she was concerned that the six girls were continuing to corrupt the little ones, by giving them bad example at every opportunity. Dr McCabe was surprised as to how this could be

the case if the children were contained in one group. She was informed the problem arose at recreation time when the groups mixed. Dr McCabe's report was summarised in the Department of Education submission:

The Rev. Mother claimed that these children were "misbehaving themselves with each other and with the small children". They were, she said, "giving bad example" ... They were said to have taken girls from another group, brought them up into the fields and taught them "wrong in the grass". When the Sister-in Charge inquired into their behaviour, one of them remarked, "It was no harm". Mr Jacobs, the painter dismissed by the school the year before, had said that he was "an old man and it was no harm" ... Much of the "bad behaviour" came to light as some of the girls were preparing for their first Holy Communion and though, when questioned, there were many "denials", one child told the Rev Mother that [named child] was "doing it constantly". For her part, the Rev Mother considered 11-year-old [named child] "the most hardened".

14.71 This characterisation of the child as the most hardened was offensive and unjust, having regard to the brutal and invasive sexual assaults she had suffered.

14.72 Dr McCabe then visited St Joseph's to investigate these complaints, and she made a written report on 24th June 1955. She concluded that two children (aged 11 and 13) were the 'ringleaders' and that another (aged 13) was 'a good follower'. The two children mentioned by her had been identified as having been abused by Jacobs in her visit in November 1954; the third child was a sister of the 11-year-old mentioned above.

14.73 This 11-year-old child was described by Dr McCabe having 'a very bad influence and I think the youngsters are terrified of her. She seems to have great power over them'.

14.74 Another child was mentioned as 'one of Jacobs unfortunates' although her name had not appeared in the November 1954 report. Dr McCabe reported:

There was another child mentioned [child named](11) but she did not try tricks herself but had been one of Mr Jacobs unfortunates, but on discretely questioning her, I discovered that he had only started on his campaign when he was disturbed!

14.75 Dr McCabe discussed the supervision with the Reverend Mother and was told the staff would need to have eyes in the back of their heads to deal with the problem:

I enquired about the playground – there is a small patch of grass on it and here some of the performance takes place and also in a shed in the playground. Apparently the little ones play "House" there (as the Sisters thought) but really this performance was taking place.

I consider that the nuns have slipped up in their supervision.

14.76 All the girls were part of one group, although they did interact with younger children in other groups at recreation. Dr McCabe observed:

The "good girls" are very alert and it is really through them that the nuns got to know about the behaviour in the grass. Now there is a kind of reign of terror there and if anyone of these girls (mentioned above) approaches a child she "runs a mile and screams".

14.77 Following a meeting with the Chief Inspector of the Department, it was decided to transfer nine girls to Kilmacud, and the transfer was authorised on 28th June 1955.

14.78 In her General Inspection Report dated 22nd to 23rd June 1955, the entry under ‘General Observations and Suggestions’ stated:

I visited this school to investigate a complaint made to me by the Mother General and Reverend Mother of the school about certain children’s behaviour in the school. As result of all this 10 girls were transferred to Kilmacud Reformatory. The chief cause of this outbreak was “lack of supervision” on the part of the community.

14.79 The Department of Education made observations on these events in its submission to the Committee. The Department stated:

The response to abuse in Kilkenny illustrates how the Department and the religious dealt with issues of child sexual abuse at the time, in particular:

- The apparent inability of the Sisters of Charity to detect what appears to have been widespread sexual abuse carried out by a long-term workman. It may not have begun with the children mentioned here.
- The decision of the Department, on the advice of the parish priest, not to pursue the prosecution of Jacobs, having considered the concern expressed by the priest to protect the children from further trauma as well as the reputation of the convent.
- The absence of professional counselling or sex education for the girls affected.
- The concern to remove certain girls from the school and the perception that the girls who had been sexually abused were compromised in some way. Some were sent back to their families, with no provision for helping them come to terms with what had happened.

14.80 Sr Astrid⁸ was appointed to the staff of St Joseph’s one year after these events in 1955. She confirmed that she heard nothing about the circumstances that had led to so many of the children being removed and to the dismissal of an employee who had been in the School for over 30 years. She said that no protocols were in place at any time for dealing with allegations of sexual abuse by the children, and the matter was never mentioned. This was notwithstanding the clear responsibility placed on the Sisters by Dr McCabe for failing to supervise the children properly.

St Anne’s, Kilmacud

14.81 The need for a dedicated reformatory for girls arose in January 1942, when two girls who had been committed to St Joseph’s Girls’ Reformatory in Limerick for ‘serious moral offences’ were deemed by the Resident Manager to be unsuitable. She requested that they be immediately discharged, in order to protect the other children and the interest of the School. It was suggested within the Department of Education that the ‘most convenient solution’ would be to establish a second reformatory school for girls who had committed moral offences. One of the problems this Institution could address was the question of children over the age of 12 who were in an industrial school and were found to be ‘exercising an evil influence over the other children’. Although the Minister had the power to transfer these girls to a reformatory, in practice this did not happen because the only reformatory for girls, in Limerick, would not take such children. St Anne’s was run by Our Lady of Charity Order, who had ‘intimated that they intended to conduct it for the benefit of girls with marked tendencies of a certain nature’.

14.82 In fact, it would appear that the only cases envisaged for St Anne’s were ‘where the girl disapproved of the intercourse and made a report to the Garda, or had an illegitimate baby to the public knowledge, or where her relations or friends learned of the act and reported it’.

⁸ This is a pseudonym.

14.83 It was to this reform school that the nine children from St Joseph's were sent. They were all 13 years of age or younger, and at least four of them had been the victims of severe sexual crimes whilst in the care of the nuns.

Complainant evidence

14.84 A witness who was in the School during the 1954 investigation and who was one of the girls transferred to Kilmacud gave evidence. She had not been abused by Jacobs, and it seems that she was sent to Kilmacud because her sister, who had been abused, was going there.

14.85 Sharon⁹ was one of five children. She lived with her parents in Dublin. The home situation was not good: her father and mother had problems, there was domestic violence and alcohol abuse, and the family faced eviction. In these circumstances, the children were taken into care. She and two of her sisters were admitted into St Joseph's, Kilkenny. She saw very little of her two sisters in the School. Her parents did not visit, her mother only came once. Her first memories were of being very frightened and trying to keep herself small. She hid under beds or behind her older sister. She remembers being very lonely and isolated. She had no one to turn to except her sister.

14.86 Prior to the day of the transfer to St Anne's, she remembered the 'set' she was in were summoned into the sitting room. They were told that some of them had been very bold. She has only a hazy recollection of what else was said, but the outcome of it was that nine or 10 of them were segregated and not allowed to mix with any other girls. They were kept in cubicles in the dormitory and could not leave there, other than to get food and then return. She remembered Sr Ella¹⁰ and Sr Liv¹¹ were there at the time, as were a number of other nuns. They were told they had committed mortal sins and sins of immodesty. She and her older sister were transferred, but another sister was left behind and she did not see her again until she was 16.

14.87 On the day of the transfer, she was pleased because she thought they were only going out for the day, as they were told they were going to the zoo. She was shocked to discover this was a lie: it was the first time a nun had lied to her. Her transfer papers to Kilmacud described her as 'not of previous good character'. She only saw these papers recently, when revealed by the Commission, and was deeply upset at this description, as she was only 10 years old at the time.

14.88 Sharon said that the nuns in St Joseph's were obsessed with religion. There was an endless litany of Mass, Novenas, Benediction, retreats, fasting, grace before and after meals, prayers night, noon and morning, and so on. She felt that the nuns were more concerned with saving their souls than anything else. They did not encourage the children to nurture friendships, and she remembered one occasion in particular: when she held the hand of a friend as they went for their Sunday walk, a nun came from behind and silently separated them.

14.89 This witness remembered very little about her schooling or the teachers, other than a climate of fear in the classroom. She attended school within the Institution. Sr Liv was the schoolteacher, and she was very strict and used a stick to slap children.

14.90 Sharon said that St Anne's, even though it was a reformatory for girls, was wonderful in comparison to St Joseph's. There was more freedom, she did not feel she was under the microscope. She never felt safe in Kilkenny, but she did not have the same feeling in St Anne's. The transfer papers had described her as 'not of previous good character', yet the Sisters in St Anne's never made her feel like that. In St Anne's, she was recognised as a person. As an example, she described the following:

⁹ This is a pseudonym.

¹⁰ This is a pseudonym.

¹¹ This is a pseudonym.

In a little way ... that I was walking on my first walk and Sister Ellen¹², who was in charge, actually took my hand. I can never forget that moment because on the one hand what was so sinful in Kilkenny, well maybe that is going too far but I wasn't allowed to do that and here I was in St Anne's and Sister Ellen took my hand.

14.91 She was introduced to the world of books in Kilmacud and became an avid reader in later life, despite having been classified as almost illiterate in Kilkenny. The food in St Anne's was not good but, because she was happy there, it did not seem to matter.

14.92 She is close to her sisters. She only found out in recent times that her older sister had been abused by Mr Jacobs in 1954, and that would have accounted for the complainant's removal from St Joseph's. Her younger sister remained in Kilkenny.

Sisters of Charity Submission

14.93 In their Submission, the Sisters of Charity disclosed that the current leadership of the Congregation first heard about the Jacobs case when they were shown documents discovered by the Department of Education in the course of investigating a complaint. Sr Úna O'Neill stated:

There is no record of any kind in any of the files of the Sisters of Charity regarding this matter and they were not aware of what had happened until the Commission made the file available for inspection to the Congregation's Solicitors in 2001.

14.94 The Sisters of Charity submitted their observations on the case. Their position was defensive. In relation to the discovery of abuse by Dr McCabe, they stated:

Even Dr Anna McCabe with her medical training, expertise and the high reputation for professionalism which she appears to have earned within the Department (in the opinion of the current Secretary General), had to persist in her interviews and questioning before evidence of abuse emerged.

14.95 From the documents, however, it would appear that the abuse emerged in the course of very gentle questioning that did not depend on medical training and expertise. Dr McCabe was thorough and prepared to coax and listen: the Sisters allude to this approach as 'persistence'.

14.96 The Submission went on to state that there was no evidence that the Sisters were 'anything other than totally co-operative throughout Dr McCabe's investigation'. Given that the investigation was into the serious sexual crimes against eight- and nine-year-old children in their care, nothing less than total co-operation would have been expected.

14.97 The Submission further asserted that, had the Sisters themselves discovered Mr Jacobs's abuse, they would have acted as decisively as they did when it was brought to their attention by Dr McCabe. The documents indicated the abuse was indeed brought to their attention by one of the little girls, and she was not believed, and her complaint was dismissed by both Sr Stella and Sr Tova.

14.98 The Submission concluded:

In these circumstances any adverse finding against the Sisters or criticism of them would be unfair and unwarranted.

14.99 This Submission was prepared in 2006. It did not address the appalling plight of the children who were abused by Mr Jacobs; it did not examine the attitude of the Sisters in seeking to remove the victims to a reformatory; it did not question the integrity of Sr Tova, who gave one account to Dr

¹² This is a pseudonym.

McCabe about the complaint made to Sr Stella, and a completely different one to the Department officials and the parish priest; it did not acknowledge the damage done to these children by the sexual abuse and its consequences, which included the children being isolated from their friends and removed to reformatories. Far from trying to help these damaged girls, the Sisters chose to dispose of them as bad influences. With their removal, the whole episode was expunged from the history of St Joseph's.

- 14.100** • **The nuns investigated the sexual behaviour among the girls and identified those involved, but did not take the next step of asking why this behaviour had happened. They blamed the children for immorality but did not follow up the inquiry as Dr McCabe did.**
- **This abuser had been employed in St Joseph's for 30 years before his activities were revealed, but the 1954 episode was treated as a single episode, and the full extent of the sexual abuse of the children was not established and no attempt was made to do so.**
- **Notwithstanding the more progressive attitude the Sisters had towards childcare, they were still unable or unwilling to believe the child who complained about Mr Jacobs. Dr McCabe uncovered the serious sexual abuse going on in St Joseph's by listening to the children.**
- **The attitude of the Sisters appeared to be to blame the children for having been abused by Jacobs, and they sought to have them transferred away from the Institution.**
- **No lessons were learned from this incident. The risk that unsupervised access posed to the children, particularly by male employees, was never acknowledged or addressed. No procedures were put in place and no warnings given to staff about listening to children who complained of sexual abuse. This was to have serious consequences less than 20 years later, when two dangerous sexual abusers were employed in the School.**

Alleged sexual abuse by a foster family

- 14.101** Annette¹³ was resident in St Joseph's, Kilkenny from the early 1950s to the early 1960s. She was three months old when admitted into care.
- 14.102** She described growing up in St Joseph's as a sad and lonely existence. She was never treated with kindness or respect. The nuns told them they were the children of prostitutes. The staff were cruel. She was often locked up in a cubby hole as a punishment for talking in the dormitory at night, so she learned not to speak. It was a frightening experience, and she was afraid to do anything other than pray to get out. She was often hit with a leather strap.
- 14.103** She was in the 'red set', a less favoured group in St Joseph's. She thought the food was horrendous: she described getting cocoa, and lumpy porridge for breakfast. She never felt full and was always aware of being hungry. She liked school, however, and was a good student.
- 14.104** In May 1961, she was released by order of the Minister for Education to Mr and Mrs Lacey.¹⁴ She was nine years old. She remembered being sent to the Reverend Mother's office and there was a couple sitting there. They seemed quite old to her and they were introduced to her as her uncle and aunt. She went out with them for day trips initially, and then she spent a couple of weeks over Christmas. The Sisters asked her how she got along and, at that stage, she thought it was

¹³ This is a pseudonym.

¹⁴ This is a pseudonym.

fun being brought to the seaside and given treats. She recalled the food they gave her was very rich and, because they gave her toys, she thought she had landed in heaven.

- 14.105** She testified that, when she was released into the care of the Laceys, things changed. She was sexually abused by Mr Lacey. He built a corrugated shed in the garden which he used solely for the purpose of raping her. He told her it was a playhouse. She believed Mrs Lacey knew what was going on as, after being raped, she told her to have a bath. It happened two or three times a week in various places, wherever they were living at the time, until she managed to 'get away' from them at the age of 15.
- 14.106** The couple travelled all over the country and spent time in Kildare, Wicklow, England, Wales etc. When she was 11, they were living in Northern Ireland, and she managed to run away at that stage, but was caught and returned to them. After this incident, she was sent by them to England to live in Mr Lacey's brother's house, and the couple later followed over. During the 13½ weeks that she spent there, she recalls regularly being given a drink and falling asleep; she would wake up next morning, partially clothed and very sore. She complained to Mrs Lacey, and was punished by being hit with a leather and locked in a cellar, or she was deprived of food. She was forced to work for the couple in all of their various enterprises, including an ice cream parlour and a restaurant.
- 14.107** Annette now knows that the Laceys were not in fact married. They were of different religions and, although one of the conditions for them to be allowed to foster her was that they would protect her religion, they never brought her to mass or church when she was with them.
- 14.108** Annette was not aware until recently where she read the documentation that the Sisters were opposed to her going to the Laceys.

What the documents revealed

- 14.109** The documents reveal mistakes by the Department of Education. The story is recounted here in some detail as an example of how failure to follow up and supervise children placed in foster care could leave them totally unprotected
- 14.110** In November 1960, Mrs Lacey wrote to the Rev Mother in St Joseph's, having been referred by an official from the Adoption Board Dublin. She and her husband were anxious to have a little girl, as they had no children of their own. She described herself as having the means to give the child a good home, a mother and father's real love, and a good education. She said they were both Catholics and in good health. The Laceys said they were married in 1928, 33 years prior to the application in 1961.
- 14.111** Sr Klara¹⁵ wrote to a senior official of the Department of Education on 25th November 1960, telling him of the request from the Laceys. She explained that Annette could not be adopted legally, as her mother was alive but untraced. She suggested that perhaps the Laceys could be her Godparents, and sought his opinion on this matter. She hoped he could help find the mother so that her consent for adoption or the Godparenting arrangement could be sought.
- 14.112** Sr Klara wrote again on 3rd December 1960, advising the official of the Department that the Gardaí had had no success in tracing Annette's mother and wondering whether she should go ahead with allowing the child go to the Laceys. She suggested getting a reference from the parish priest before making a final decision. At this stage, the Laceys had brought the child out for outings and were keen to take her. The official advised her to get the reference from the parish priest before allowing it to go ahead.

¹⁵ This is a pseudonym.

14.113 On 10th December 1960, Sr Klara wrote to Mr Wade of the Department of Education as follows:

Since our conversation (phone) I have received a letter from my friend to whom I wrote for information re. couple who wish to adopt Annette. It seems this “party” is only here for the past few months from England. The husband is a lapsed Catholic, and the wife a Protestant. As we have been warned that “couples” are going through Dublin trying to adopt children, and from the information just received, I don’t think it wise to go any further unless we get a very definite proof of the suitability of the Adopting Parents.

14.114 Sr Klara wrote again to Mr Wade on 12th December 1960, expressing her continuing uneasy mind regarding the couple who wished to adopt Annette, and seeking his advice as to whether she should pursue the matter with the parish priest in the UK, as the couple had only resided four months in Ireland. The parish priest in Terenure had vouched that they were attentive to their Church duties in the four months that he knew them and were worthy and reliable people.

14.115 Sr Klara came under increasing pressure from the Laceys, who were indignant that Mr Wade, when he interviewed them, had information to suggest that they were not Catholics. Mrs Lacey denied this and said they attended Mass every Sunday. Sr Klara remained very doubtful about them.

14.116 On 15th December 1960, in an internal memorandum to the Inspector in the Department of Education, the author advised that he had spoken to the parish priest in Terenure, who recommended that the child should be allowed out to the Laceys for Christmas.

14.117 In a letter dated 15th December 1960, Mrs Lacey wrote to the Department:

Dear Sir,

As requested I herewith make an application for permission to have Annette the child from St. Joseph’s Industrial School, Kilkenny for the Christmas period. My husband and I have already had her out for one day and we have asked the Mother Superior to let us have her with us, as we are giving a children’s party at our café, and the Mother Superior said as far as she was concerned it would be alright. The child having no parents or relatives we are both willing to help her in every way possible, by giving her a good home, with a Mother’s and Father’s love, bringing her up in the Catholic faith, and educating her in the best possible manner. We are quite aware on account of her age that we cannot adopt her legally, but are more than willing to be her Foster Mother and Father. My husband being Managing Director of a large firm tells you that we have the means to do the very best for the child. Trusting you will grant us this permission.

Yours Faithfully

Mrs Lacey

14.118 A note on the letter said: ‘Phoned Sr Klara and informed her of our inquiries. She is now satisfied to release child for Xmas holidays and we are to [make] ... inquiries regarding Lacey couple with a view to advising mgr on question of release on supervision certificate TOR 16/12/60’.

14.119 On the same document, the particulars with regard to her release for Christmas were recorded, together with a note of an interview with the Laceys on 16th December 1960:

Interviewed Lacey couple – wife claims to be a convert and husband to have been reared a catholic but has not been assiduous in the practice of his religion. He undertook to produce their marriage certificate.

- 14.120** In a letter to Mrs Lacey dated 8th January 1961, Sr Klara informed her that Annette was safely back in Kilkenny and had been telling the Sisters about the wonderful time she had with ‘my Mammy and my Daddy’ and thanking her for giving her such a good time.
- 14.121** The child obviously had an accident whilst with the couple, because Sr Klara also noted that ‘on the following day she would take Annette to the Dr. to have the stitches removed D.V’.
- 14.122** It appeared from the documentation that followed that the Laceys travelled to the UK in early January 1961, to expedite references and other matters required for the adoption of Annette. Mr Lacey had written to his parish priest in Oldham in England, seeking confirmation that he was married in the Catholic Church. The parish priest was unable to provide this, but said he saw no reason to doubt Mr Lacey’s word that he had been. There was also a short note from another parish priest where the Laceys resided for six years, which said the couple were known to him and well suited to have care of a child.
- 14.123** On 8th February 1961, the Laceys contacted the Department to press for the release of Annette, citing the fact that they had purchased a new house and were anxious to purchase furniture with Annette in mind. This prompted Mr McDevitt to write to the parish priest of Oldham to seek confirmation that the Laceys had married in the Catholic Church sometime in 1928, possibly around May. He could not provide the exact date.
- 14.124** He did not receive a reply and followed this up with another letter on 9th March 1961. This letter was returned to Mr McDevitt with the following handwritten note by the parish priest:
- St. Mary’s Oldham
Dear Sir,
As far as we can ascertain the facts given by Mr Lacey are true and to be believed.
Sincerely yours, P.P
- 14.125** The Laceys followed up with another letter to the Department on 16th March 1961, pressing the Department for a decision about releasing Annette to them. They felt they had provided more than enough information to the Department about themselves and asked the Department to give the matter urgent consideration.
- 14.126** In a detailed report in April 1961, concerning the Laceys’ application, Mr Wade wrote to Mr McDevitt, Inspector. He set out the circumstances of how the couple came to Ireland in 1960 and immediately contacted the Adoption Board with regard to taking a child into their household. They had been referred by the Adoption Board to St Joseph’s, Kilkenny as an institution that might be able to ‘supply their want’. Sr Klara understood from this referral that they had been vouched for by the official in the Adoption Board, and she introduced the couple to Annette. Mr Wade had met the couple on several occasions as they had called into the Department. On the surface, they appeared pleasant but he had a number of concerns. First, Mr Lacey admitted to being lax about his religious duties; secondly, Mrs Lacey protested that she was a convert to Catholicism but was hazy as to the date of her conversion from the Protestant religion; and, finally, although she could give the location, she was not sure of the exact date of her marriage to Mr Lacey. Added to this, Sr Klara had her own doubts about the couple’s religious persuasion and had been warned that couples were going about the country seeking to adopt infants – therefore, she was not prepared to make the decision on her own authority. Mr Wade concluded that the application should be refused on the grounds that the whereabouts of the child’s mother were unknown and her consent would be needed for final discharge, coupled with the vague replies by the Laceys about their marriage.
- 14.127** This report was passed on to the Secretary of the Department by Mr McDevitt on 26th April 1961, with a long handwritten note attached. He described the case as somewhat difficult, because the

Laceys appeared on the face of it to be the ideal couple to be given the care of the child, were it not for their difficulties in verifying their pasts so far as religion was concerned. He had spoken with them and felt they were not being frank about the matter, although very anxious to get custody of the child. The clergy in Britain had not been helpful in clarifying the matter. He concluded his report with the following:

Considering (1) that the child's parents may still be and probably are alive; (2) that the child was committed on grounds which are now invalid and that some doubt may therefore be entertained as to whether the Minister has power to discharge her on supervision certificate ('tho I think he has), and that there is the possibility of endangering her faith, the balance of argument appears to be against acceding to the application and I so recommend. If approved, I suggest that refusal be communicated in interview.

14.128 In an internal memorandum to the Minister dated 28th April 1961, the author (T.O R) also expressed some reservations but, overall, was in favour of letting the child out to the couple. His reasons were that, in the first instance, it was against the Constitution for the child to be detained by them under any circumstances. Secondly, two parish priests were satisfied that the girl's religious affairs would be catered for, and so the Department was covered from the moral point of view. As for his own conscience, he would be guided by the fact that nothing but good could come from her being with this couple. He recommended that the child should be allowed to live with them on the understanding that either parent could come forward to claim her back at any time.

14.129 She was discharged by order of the Minister to Mr and Mrs Lacey on 5th May 1961.

14.130 The following additional particulars were recorded:

Annette was discharged on May 5th 1961 by Order of the Minister of Education to Mr and Mrs Lacey, [address redacted]. Mr McDevitt and the Resident Manager (Sr Klara) were not in favour of this adoption.

14.131 On 11th May 1961, Mr and Mrs Lacey were informed officially in writing that, after very careful consideration, the Minister for Education had now ordered the release of Annette to their care with the condition attached that, if her parents at a future date claimed custody, they would have to immediately surrender the child to them. Mr McDevitt signed the letter on behalf of the Minister and also asked the couple to keep him informed of any change of address made by them. The Resident Manager in Kilkenny was informed in writing at the same time.

14.132 Precisely one year later, on 11th May 1962, Mr Wade received a memorandum from one of the Departmental officials who said he had called on Mr and Mrs Lacey at the address where they were living when Annette was discharged to them. He spoke to the woman who now occupied the house. She told him the Laceys had left a long time ago, had sold their business and now had either a pub, or a fish and chip shop in the Southeast.

14.133 Enquiries were made by the Department with the Gardaí in the Southeast on 22nd May 1962, and neither Annette nor the Laceys had ever been heard of. Eventually, the Gardaí located the Laceys. The Department noted that they should have been informed of their change of address by them, and it was felt that enquiry should be made in regard to Annette's welfare, spiritual and otherwise. This note is dated 28th May 1962.

14.134 Sometime between June and September 1962, Mrs Lacey wrote to the Reverend Mother in Kilkenny from her address, expressing a wish to return Annette because she said Annette was lying, stealing and using bad language. They had had to remove her from her school in a local

convent, as she was not making any progress, and she was a constant worry to them and clearly did not appreciate what was being done for her.

14.135 Sr Hanna,¹⁶ who had taken over from Sr Klara, informed Mr McDevitt about the letter and advised him that she had written immediately to Mrs Lacey to tell her the child would be welcome back in St Joseph's and was expecting her back any day.

14.136 This prompted the following letter to be sent by the Laceys to the Department on 3rd September 1962:

Dear Sir,

Some time ago I wrote to the Rev. Mother at Kilkenny School stating that we were very disappointed in Annette, the way in which she had turned out, by stealing things, and above all telling lies, not thinking they would inform you in this matter. However, since we have warned her that she would have to go back to St. Joseph's she has improved considerably, and is now attending the local school. I know in her heart of hearts she does not want to leave us, or to go back. Owing to my writing this letter we have had a visit from the Rev. Mother, and she advised us to have an older girl who was well moulded and whose character was well formed. She thought and we both agreed with her, that it would help Annette very much to have somebody like that, as we feel it would break her heart to be sent back now after 18 months and we do not wish to part with her unless she commenced her bad ways again. As you know we are in a position financially to have another girl, also good accommodation to accept an older girl like the Rev Mother suggested and we would train her to take a good position in life. Trusting you will be able to arrange this for us ... Yours faithfully ...

14.137 This letter was sent to the Resident Manager for her observations on the matters raised in it. Sr Hanna called the Department and spoke to Mr Wade, who noted her views in a handwritten note dated 18th September 1962:

Sister Hanna called on 12/9/62 to discuss this case. She is very worried about Annette and would like her to be anywhere but with the Lacey's, whom she considers unsuitable to rear the child. Her offer of a second girl to the Lacey's was made in the hope of getting Annette back and she had no intention of fulfilment.

14.138 Following this memorandum, it appears that Sr Hanna and Mr McDevitt paid a visit to the Laceys and told them that Annette's grandfather was seeking custody, and Rev Mother wished to have her returned to the School by Sunday 7th October.

14.139 The Laceys wrote to the Department on 1st October 1962, expressing this as a great shock to them, as they had been told 18 months previously by the then Rev Mother that she was the only child available in Kilkenny that had no parents. They insisted that she did not want to leave them and had come to know them as her parents. They said they had inquired about the grandfather, who was out all day and only returned late at night, so she would not get the care and attention she needed. They also said that Mr McDevitt had indicated that it was a matter between Reverend Mother and themselves, as he could not force them to give up the child. They pleaded with the Department to assist them in the matter.

14.140 The Department acknowledged receipt of the letter on 2nd October 1962 and advised that inquiries were being made. The question is whether anybody spoke to Annette. The person who was best placed to deal with any reservations about the Laceys was Annette. There is no record of any communication with Annette, either by the Department or by the Sisters.

¹⁶ This is a pseudonym.

14.141 The next piece of correspondence on file is four months later, dated April 1963, and was a note from the Laceys to the Department advising them that they were returning to England on 9th April 1963. They explained the short notice due to delays in finalising deals. They expressed their intention to send Annette to a Catholic boarding school as soon as they were settled in England and gave their new address. They told the recipient not to worry about her, as she would be brought up as a good Catholic and with a good education.

14.142 A break in the documentation then occurred, but Annette's evidence was that, throughout this time, she was subjected to severe, continuing sexual abuse by Mr Lacey, both in Ireland and in England.

14.143 Four years later, the following letter was received by Rev Mother in St Joseph's, Kilkenny from a Church of Ireland Vicar based in Northern Ireland dated 22nd May 1967, and read as follows:

Very Rev and Dear Mother,

I wish to make enquiries about a child who was possibly fostered or adopted from your Orphanage some years ago. I have only the scantiest details concerning her and I would be grateful if you could assist me in disseminating the facts.

1) Child's name: Annette – Surname unknown

Age: 14 $\frac{1}{2}$ –15

2) Party who fostered or adopted her: Mr Lacey and his wife Roman Catholic and Church of England respectively.

Occupation: Café caterers since 1966, formerly Industrial Caterers in England or Wales some years ago.

The child has not practiced her religion since coming here nor has she been encouraged to do so. She has been absent from school since February at her "parents'" connivance. I fear she may be in real danger from lack of proper supervision. "Parents" unsuited to the task of properly rearing the girl. If this child has ever been in your care, and if you still have any legal authority over her would be grateful if you would let me know. The local Divisional Welfare Offices are also interested in the child and have left the matter in my hands to see if something could be done for the child before it is too late. Please forgive me putting such a problem before you – If you have any facts concerning her I would be grateful if you would let me know at your earliest convenience.

Respectfully yours

Vicar

14.144 The Resident Manager sent a copy of the letter to Mr McDevitt on 4th June 1967, reminding him of their reservations about the couple at the time and recalling that they had done their best to prevent her leaving St Joseph's.

14.145 In January 1968, concern for the welfare of Annette moved from Northern Ireland to the UK. The Children's Officer in the UK wrote to the Education Officer in Belfast, reminding him to follow up with the Department of Education in Ireland concerning this child. The inquiry was forwarded to the Department sometime after 15th March 1968.

14.146 On 30th September 1969, when Annette was 17 years of age, the Children's Officer in the County Borough of [place redacted] wrote to the Inspector of Reformatory and Industrial Schools with the following information:

Dear Sir,

Re: Annette – 1.11.52

The above named girl was placed by you in 1961 from St Joseph's School, Kilkenny into the care of Mr and Mrs Lacey who were, at that time, living in, Co Dublin.

After moving from place to place in Ireland the Lacey's eventually came to live in [the UK]. Over the last few months, they have alternatively written letters complaining about the girl's behaviour and asking for help and others to say that everything was alright and they preferred not to be visited.

On the 13th August, 1969, Mr and Mrs Lacey deposited Annette's belongings in the Department with a final letter to say that they wished to have no more to do with her.

As we have no background knowledge of this girl prior to her going to live with the Lacey's, I would be most grateful for any information you could supply regarding Annette's case history before this time.

Yours Sincerely

[Children's Officer]

14.147 The Department did not respond until four months later and, in a letter dated January 1970, they stated:

Dear Madam,

With reference to the enquiry you made in September last in regard to above-named girl, I am directed to inform you that according to the records of this office, Annette was an illegitimate child, the daughter of [details redacted mother later re-married] ... The couple separated. It is believed they are in England, but the address of either party is not known.

Annette was baptised a Roman Catholic. She was committed to the care of St Joseph's Industrial School, Kilkenny by order of Court [date redacted]. She remained in that school until May 1961, when she was discharged to the custody of Mr and Mrs Lacey, then living in Co Dublin [address redacted]. The Lacey's later went to reside in England. It was made a condition of the discharge of Annette to their care that should either or her parents at a future date claim custody of this child the Lacey family would have no option but to surrender her immediately to such parent.

I am to express regret for delay in replying to your letter and that we have no more useful information to give. The Resident Manager of St Joseph's School, Kilkenny, may be able to supply more details in the case, such as Annette's progress at school, names and addresses of relatives or friends in this country.

Your Faithfully

14.148 By this time, January 1970, Annette was almost 18 years old.

14.149 • **The documents in this case disclose that considerable thought was given to placing the child with the Laceys but they do not record that the essential requirement of supervision, namely communication with the child, took place.**

Complainant account of sexual abuse by fostering family

14.150 Another complainant was five years old when she was committed to St Joseph's with two of her sisters, and remained until she was 16. She was from a Traveller family and could remember many arguments between her mother and father as a young child. She did not remember the court experience, but her sister told her that she did not think the family understood that the committal would be for such a long period. Her brother was committed to another industrial school

at the same time, and she never saw him during those years. Her father was killed in the late 1960s. She has since been told by relatives that he was disappointed and remorseful that he never managed to get his family out of St Joseph's.

- 14.151** This witness's main complaint was that she had been sexually abused by the father of a family to whom she was sent for holidays. She stated that children in St Joseph's went out on holidays on a regular basis. They were sent to families for the month of August. A large group of them would go up to Dublin on the train to be met by their host families at Heuston Station. She was sent to a family who had no children of their own. Initially, she was sent with another girl from St Joseph's and it was all very exciting. She was paraded around by the couple to their friends' houses and shown off as the 'child they had for the month of August'. The husband started to abuse her. It started with touching and eventually led to more serious abuse. She cannot understand how the family were not vetted. She was discharged to them, and the abuse continued when she lived with them full-time. When she started dating her boyfriend, she told him what was going on and he confronted the man's wife and told her what her husband was doing.
- 14.152** She said she had been taken out of school because the couple permission to have her discharged to them. They suggested that she could work for them in their office in Dublin. She stayed with them for about a year.
- 14.153** She remembered an occasion when another pupil of St Joseph's, who was staying with a befriending family, called to visit her. The father attempted to abuse the young girl, who had to lock herself into a bathroom. The girls discussed it afterwards, but the complainant was the only person the girl spoke to.
- 14.154** She had very few vivid memories of her initial period in St Joseph's. She was committed with two of her sisters. The three of them were put into the green set in the charge of two nuns, one of whom she described as 'evil'. The other would hit the children across the ears for no apparent reason.
- 14.155** She went to school in St Joseph's primary school and then to the Presentation Convent in Kilkenny. She did well in school and was quite disappointed when she was taken out just before she was due to sit her Intermediate Certificate to stay with the foster family.
- 14.156** She believes that she was treated differently from other girls in St Joseph's because of her travelling background. For example, she suffered verbal abuse, being called '*tinker*' by other girls. Her sisters received similar treatment. The nuns knew it was going on, but there was no attempt to stop it by the Superiors or those in charge. She also felt her family were discriminated against when they visited her.
- 14.157** She has heard from other family members that her father often cycled from [another county] where he worked to see them but was turned away. She made inquiries about this from family members, and she found out recently that her father had tried on several occasions to get the children out of the School. For the past 30 years she had believed that her father did not care about his family. It was only when the documents were shown to her in the process of this inquiry that she learnt the true situation and it has angered and upset her greatly. She believed that, if he had succeeded in getting them out, they would at least have been loved. They never got any love in the School. As a result, she found it difficult to this day to hug her own children.
- 14.158** She maintained some contact with her friends from St Joseph's, and has attended some reunions to see them. She does not regard it as her home nor does she go to see the nuns: she attends just to stay in touch with the girls, as they have a lot in common. Most of the girls in her set, the green set, have very bad memories but she believes that girls in other sets would have different

memories. In particular she says that those in the blue set *'were made'*. The sets were segregated: every child in the green set felt they were nobodies, and she believed that was the reason why they were in that set. Most of the girls in it came from dysfunctional families. The red set was not too bad – they were *'half right'*. The blue set was a totally different scene, because they got all the extras. Sr Astrid had overall responsibility for all sets, but was specifically in charge of the blue set. Once assigned to a set, there was no possibility of moving to another.

14.159 She thought Sr Astrid would like to believe that she was close to all the children, but that was not the case. The children tried to keep in with her but Sr Astrid had her own cronies and pets, and she gave them extras.

14.160 It is difficult to see how the nuns in St Joseph's could have known if a befriending family was abusive unless the child herself told them. However, they should have taught the girls to recognise inappropriate behaviour and to report it.

14.161 Differential treatment between the units is a major criticism of the institution.

Positive witnesses

14.162 The first positive witness proposed by the Sisters had no contact with her natural parents and was almost two and a half years old when she was placed in St Joseph's. In her early period there, she was cared for in the nursery but she had very little recollection of that time.

14.163 During the rest of her period in St Joseph's, she was part of a group known as the *'blue set'*, which had Sr Astrid in charge, assisted by a number of lay staff. There were 30 girls in the blue set, ranging from five to 16 years. Once a child was assigned to a set, it was usual for her to remain there. She cannot remember any occasion when a child was transferred from one set to another, nor does she think it would have been possible to ask for a change of set. The different sets would get together during recreation in the playground, and when they went to outside school after the age of 10 or 11. They also came together in the recreation hall for an hour or two of television, as there was only one television at that time. Each set had its own dormitories, subdivided into senior and junior, its own sitting room and refectory.

14.164 Daily life in St Joseph's involved a routine of getting up in the morning before school and carrying out a number of chores. The older girls would have some duties in looking after the younger girls, to ensure they were getting their meals or that they were going to church in the mornings. Children did the washing up after meals. On reflection, she was very satisfied with the food. They had porridge for breakfast, and dinners varied with food such as stews, corned beef and smoked haddock. They had a drink of cocoa after school, and tea, bread and jam at teatime. The older girls sometimes helped out in the nursery, especially during the summer months. Before she left, she had also worked in the bread room.

14.165 She went to school in St Joseph's until the age of 11, and then on to the Presentation Convent in Kilkenny, which was a 20-minute walk away. Two or three girls walked to and from school together each day. They returned home for lunch. She had no problems in school and made a lot of friends, especially through sports. She did not recall any difficulty integrating with the girls in the Presentation Convent. She was encouraged by the Sisters to stay on and further her education, and she believed herself and two other pupils were the first girls to do their Leaving Certificate from St Joseph's. She passed it and went on to Secretarial College and subsequently had a successful career.

14.166 She made good friends within St Joseph's and was still in contact with many of them. They were scattered widely around the world, in London, Germany, Italy and the United States.

- 14.167** During the summer months, there were outings to the seaside. In August each year, St Joseph's closed and all the girls went out to families. She went to a family in Sandymount, Dublin, which she found a very positive experience.
- 14.168** She described Sr Astrid as a very gentle person who did not slap the children. She hardly ever raised her voice to anyone. She was very good to them. The main means of discipline was to remove privileges, such as the film night or the weekly pocket money.
- 14.169** That was the situation in the blue set. From what she has heard, the experience in other sets was a little different: control was achieved more by voices raised in temper, and the atmosphere may have been different, as some of the nuns and staff were more strict. She has not heard any complaints about physical punishment, but she knew that bed-wetters probably had to wash their own sheets.
- 14.170** She did not remember any children in her set ever being put in a cubby hole as a punishment. She did recall that there was a cubby hole which held sweeping brushes and the like. She had heard of the threat of being put in a cubby hole in the other sets, but not in her set. She did not know what went on in other sets.
- 14.171** Overall, she found the experience in St Joseph's a good one, but she did find life a bit restricted. This may have been for security reasons, but everything, even hours of play, was regimented to a certain time.
- 14.172** She has kept contact with Sr Astrid over the years. When she left St Josephs, she stayed in a house in Dublin which was solely used for the purpose of looking after the girls when they arrived in Dublin. She has attended reunions in Kilkenny every two years for the past 14 or 15 years.
- 14.173** The second positive witness had been in care from the age of four, and was 12 years old when she arrived at St Joseph's in the mid-1960s. From the start, she thought it was really good and settled in easily. She was placed in the red set with her sister, who was two years older. Mrs Dunphy¹⁷ was in charge and personally she found her nice, but thought she could be strict, and some younger children may have found her a bit cross. Discipline was enforced by stopping pocket money or not allowing children to view the film.
- 14.174** She remained in the red set until she was transferred to the green set two years before she left St Joseph's. She did not ask for the transfer, but was pleased with the move and thought there was a very good atmosphere in the green set. Sr Tilda¹⁸ was in charge and she was kind to all the children. She was older by then and was allowed a lot more freedom. The girls were friendly and she was very involved in sports. She won All-Ireland camogie medals. She believed that every opportunity was given to her to develop in St Joseph's, and she felt she did a lot better than many children from ordinary homes. During summer holidays, she went to a befriending family who were extremely kind to her. She did her Leaving Certificate and said that anyone inclined to do so was encouraged to study and do well. Subsequently, she did a commercial course in Dublin in a private college and eventually got a good job. She thought the driving force for all of this was Sr Astrid.
- 14.175** She believed that St Joseph's, Kilkenny would have been a role model as a school, had it remained single sex. The introduction of boys was not good for the School. One of the things she missed about the School was not being part of a family and not being shown affection. She found things were sometimes a bit rigid, but felt this was mainly because there were a large number of children to cater for.

¹⁷ This is a pseudonym.

¹⁸ This is a pseudonym.

14.176 Sr Astrid was asked whether she agreed with the suggestion that those who were in the 'blue set', which was under her immediate control, fared much better than the children in the other sets. Sr Astrid insisted that she did not treat any of the children differently. The groups were very separate. She did not accept that the blue set got things that the others did not. She said that the Superior gave all the groups the same things, but thought that perhaps sometimes someone from her own family might come and give her group extra sweets and things like that. She agreed that Traveller children could be called names by the others, as they had a lot of children round the place and name-calling was inevitable.

- 14.177**
- **The group care system could not replace a loving family, but it did offer a more child-centred environment where children were encouraged both socially and educationally.**
 - **Attending the external school worked well for the children, and there is evidence at this time of good integration between the children from St Joseph's and the local community.**

The Group Homes

14.178 The system of grouping children into smaller units appeared to work reasonably well throughout the 1950s and into the 1960s. In 1966, however, a decision was taken to close St Patrick's, Kilkenny as an industrial school. It had catered for boys up to the age of eight and had been run by the Sisters of Charity. Many of the residents of St Joseph's had brothers in St Patrick's and, indeed, this was one of the reasons the Department of Education gave for recommending the transfer of the boys to St Joseph's. Accordingly, 28 boys were transferred, to be retained until eight years of age.

14.179 The sudden increase in numbers, and the integration of boys into the School, caused problems for the management.

14.180 In an undated document entitled 'Report for The Department of Education', which would appear to have been written in late 1969, the case was made for the need for St Joseph's Industrial School to move toward forming group residences in the community. The report stated that, during the year 1968/69, the Sisters experienced much unrest and disturbance amongst the children. It manifested itself in a variety of ways, such as absconding and repeated 'burning incidents'. According to the report, these problems arose mainly because of lack of proper accommodation, and proper staff and recreational facilities, which were all put down, in turn, to lack of financial assistance.

14.181 The report further stated that, in an effort to cope with this problem in May 1969, a small group of the most disturbed children was placed in a house in Kilkenny donated by Bishop Birch, under the care of one of the Sisters, and the children were treated in every respect like an ordinary family. This project, initially an experiment, was a great success, and it became clear that efforts like this would eliminate many of the problems in St Joseph's.

14.182 According to the report, the Sisters consulted with experts in the US and Britain, and set about reorganising the Institution in groups/units as close as possible to the ordinary family. Four groups with 16 children and three groups with 10 in each were formed, with children of both sexes, ranging between the ages of two and 18 years. Children under two years were kept in a separate nursery. Each of the separate groups was staffed by three adults. Alterations were made to the Institution and the old national school to accommodate the groups, and two dwelling houses were purchased. The Sisters asked the Department to assess the situation as soon as possible, as the Congregation could not meet all the costs involved, and needed assistance with reconstruction work, the purchase of recreational facilities and transport for the children.

14.183 On 12th September 1969, Bishop Birch followed up this proposal by formally requesting the Department for financial assistance to enable St Joseph's to carry out the programme of reconstruction which would bring the Institution in line with modern thinking on childcare.

14.184 The Sisters went ahead with their plans. They altered the existing buildings and acquired two houses in a nearby housing estate, half a mile away, to set up two 'family-type' houses. This was done without sanction from the Department of Education, which was presented with the problem of whether to finance the venture, when it had not sanctioned it in advance. The Department of Finance refused the request for extra funding.

14.185 On 11th September 1969, Mr Wade from the Department travelled to Kilkenny with Mr Madden to inspect the 'unauthorised works' which were at that time being carried out, and about which Dr Birch and Sr Wilma¹⁹ had called to see the Secretary of the Department. Mr Wade set out the situation as far as he saw it:

To fully understand how the nuns in charge of the Industrial School came to find themselves in their present plight the following comment may be of assistance. Since the appointment of Dr Birch as Bishop of Ossory there has been a convulsion in the social conscience of the laity and clergy in the Diocese of Ossory resulting in a welter of activity for the underprivileged from child adoption to geriatrics embracing also itinerants. Nuns, priest and students from St Kieran's Seminary are involved to a greater extent than ever before among the poor and needy. A social centre has been erected on the grounds of the community, a nursery to facilitate adoption work has been approved by the Department of Health and will also be erected on the convent grounds and there are itinerants settlement schemes, meals on wheels, companions for the old etc etc. Add to this a favourable comment from a member of the Committee on the Reformatory and Industrial Schools on the standards of St Joseph's, advance information from a member of the Committee that the group system of caring for children would be a recommendation and that grants would be available for building to assist in the changeover from the present methods and the stage was set for the nuns to run off in all directions without an Architect (except for on one item, play space and enclosed gymnasium) without authority, without money or the overdraft facilities to pay for the job.

14.186 He was sorry for the situation the nuns found themselves in, describing it as quite pathetic. He felt that:

the Bishop abetted by a young radical member of the community played a large part in creating this situation and it seems the Department will have to come to the rescue by making a case to the Department of Finance for an ex gratia grant.

14.187 He also advised that the new Resident Manager needed to be told that policy making and major decisions in matters that concern the welfare of committed children had to have the approval of the Minister, who alone was the responsible authority in these areas.

14.188 The case was made by the Secretary of the Department of Education to the Department of Finance on behalf of the Sisters of Charity in a memorandum dated 7th October 1969. It stated that St Joseph's, Kilkenny was a well-run school and, in the view of the Minister, would always have a place in the field of childcare:

not alone for its success as an industrial school, but, because of the considerable increase in costs if it were to be replaced by an institution under lay management.

¹⁹ This is a pseudonym.

- 14.189** The Department of Finance refused to make the payment, as provision in the Vote for the Office of Public Works for school building was already over-expended.
- 14.190** The Department of Education wrote again to Finance on 2nd March 1970, advising them that they had a surplus of £15,000 from the Reformatory and Industrial School budget, and wondered if they could pay this out to the Sisters. The Department of Finance gave their sanction and the money was paid.
- 14.191** A General Inspection was carried out on 7th November 1971; the previous one had taken place on 8th May 1970. The Inspector noted under Sanitation, Health, Food and Diet that it was quite obvious that these were given top priority by the Sisters. He found the premises in good condition, and the changeover from institutionalisation to the group home system was well underway. The staff were hard working and forward thinking. The Sisters were planning to acquire the use of another nearby house for adolescent boys, as the Resident Manager was concerned about these children. He also met and had a long discussion with Sr Wilma regarding the childcare course in Kilkenny.
- 14.192** Mr Crean inspected the School on 10th November 1972 and was very pleased with the School. He made the following general observations:
- In the last 4 or 5 years the Community at St Joseph's has spent generously and constructively – works of improvement are still in progress. It is a wonderful home for the children in care – it caters for 100 children on average – boys and girls from the age of a few weeks, up to 17+ in the case of girls and 15+ in the case of boys.
- 14.193** Mr Crean praised the way in which day-to-day problems were courageously tackled. The education of the children was given top priority. Thirteen girls and one senior boy were in different boarding schools. There was never a failure at Intermediate Certificate, Leaving Certificate or Group Certificate level.
- 14.194** Much of the correspondence in 1973 between the Department of Education and the Resident Manager related to finance. It is clear from this correspondence that the Department officials were very much on the side of the Sisters of Charity. As far as they were concerned, St Joseph's was one of the most progressive schools in the country and had carried out extensive works of adaptation and purchase of property to form self-contained group homes. Since 1968, the Sisters had expended a total of £80,000, and the State had contributed £24,000 towards it by 1973. The Department was critical of how the Sisters had embarked on such a substantial programme of development, but was in no doubt that the augmented capitation grants were being put to proper use. The properties acquired were vested in the Sisters and not in the State, and the Department of Finance was reluctant to give grants towards the acquisition of property on which it would have no claim.
- 14.195** Two Department officials visited Stanhope Street Convent in Dublin on 18th May 1973, where the Sisters were proposing to set up an aftercare hostel for up to 13 senior girls from Kilkenny who would be commencing work or continuing with studies in Dublin. The estimated cost was £21,000. They agreed to recommend to the Department that they should provide £15,000 toward the project.
- 14.196** In the final paragraph of the memorandum of the visit, the following is recorded:
- Sister Astrid adverted also to problems relating to emotional disturbance among children in the Kilkenny home. It was agreed that this was a growing problem in these homes which needs consideration.

- 14.197** It appeared from the correspondence between Sr Astrid and Dr Paul McQuaid, Consultant Child Psychiatrist, dated 12th December 1973 that he had found that a significant number of children in care in St Joseph's were seriously or moderately disturbed. This led to a visit to Kilkenny by a Principal Officer from the Department on 29th April 1974. He met with Sr Astrid, Resident Manager, the Programme Manager for the South Eastern Health Board, and the Bishop of Ossory. The focus of the visit was to assess the needs of the School and future trends in dealing with the problem of emotionally disturbed children in the home.
- 14.198** The first report from Inspector Graham Granville was dated 22nd February 1976, and was very positive about all aspects of the School in terms of facilities and care for the children. The Sisters complained to him of lack of follow-up by social workers who requested places for children, had them admitted, and then failed to keep in touch with the child; and they sought Mr Granville's assistance in tackling this problem.
- 14.199** Around this time, the School was experiencing problems with some of the children, in particular with getting them to attend the local schools and to be accepted there.
- 14.200** The problem with local schools came up for mention again in a General Inspection Report dated 27th January 1977 carried out by Mr Granville. He noted that, although the children attended local schools and were allowed to join in school activities, there was not good contact between the local schools and the residential home with regard to the children's progress etc. In a handwritten note on the end of the report, it was decided that the Schools Inspector would meet the Bishop and Sr Astrid to try and resolve the education problem. The author noted that Kilkenny was by far the biggest residential home in the country, and perhaps the unwieldy size was responsible for some of the problems.
- 14.201** Mr Granville concluded his report in January 1977 with the following comment: 'This residential complex has a great deal to offer the South Eastern district if it is properly supported and guided'.

Allegations of sexual abuse in the 1970s

- 14.202** In January 1995, a Garda Sergeant, stationed at Kilkenny Garda Station, began an investigation into allegations of sexual and physical abuse at St Joseph's School in Kilkenny. In the course of his enquiries, he heard allegations of severe sexual abuse, including buggery, and of physical abuse against two men who had been employed in St Joseph's during the 1970s. The first of these allegations involved Thomas Pleece,²⁰ who was employed in St Joseph's from 1972 until 1976, when he was summarily removed by the Resident Manager following complaints by boys.
- 14.203** The second man was Peter Tade,²¹ who succeeded Mr Pleece as a care worker in St Joseph's in 1976.
- 14.204** Thomas Pleece admitted sexual abuse in St Joseph's, as well as in St Augustine's where he had worked previously, and also to abusing two boys fostered by him after he left St Joseph's. He was indicted on 271 counts and received a 10-year sentence in October 1997.
- 14.205** Peter Tade was indicted on 10 counts and he was sentenced to four years' imprisonment in June 1998.
- 14.206** According to the Congregation, 1995 was the first time it became aware of allegations of sexual abuse in St Joseph's.

²⁰ This is a pseudonym.

²¹ This is a pseudonym.

Thomas Pleece

14.207 After the decision to take in young boys in 1966, the Department of Education Inspectors recommended that St Joseph's should employ male staff to help care for them. The first of these carers was Thomas Pleece.

14.208 The decision to close St Patrick's and transfer the boys to St Joseph's caused a number of problems for St Joseph's. The girls resented the presence of the boys in the School, and it was difficult to keep boys and girls separated at night.

14.209 Thomas Pleece completed the course and, on completion, was highly recommended to Sr Astrid, who appointed him with sole responsibility for 16 teenage boys. He was House Parent for Summerhill, one of the group homes in St Joseph's. According to Sr Úna O'Neill, who gave evidence to the Committee as Superior General of the Congregation:

He was the House Parent for Summerhill so he would effectively have been in charge of the house. The manager would have visited as she did fairly regularly all of the houses each day and every evening. She and all concerned thought it was a great achievement to have a man in charge of the boys. In his professional child care capacity it was assumed that he would act as a father figure and role model for them.

14.210 This was a view echoed by Mr Graham Granville at the time, who wrote of Mr Pleece in an Inspection Report of November 1972:

... he is young – probably 28 years – single and naturally at ease with youngsters whilst unobtrusively maintaining discipline. If he applied and were selected for Oberstown, I understand he would be badly missed at St Joseph's.

14.211 Thomas Pleece said in evidence that he first became involved with childcare when he started to work in St Augustine's Special School in Blackrock. He admitted to sexual abuse of boys in St Augustine's. He had formerly worked in a factory.

14.212 From Blackrock he went to the childcare course in Kilkenny in 1971. He said that he did not have the necessary educational requirement for the course, and was therefore surprised to get an interview. He had to provide them with an essay/project to satisfy the educational aspect. He also had a formal interview with three or four persons on the panel. He had the requisite two years' experience in childcare in St Augustine's, and he provided three references. He was one of only three lay persons who attended the first course in 1971. The other 17 participants were Religious. The college organised a placement for him in St Joseph's. He lived in St Joseph's during the year of the course and, in return for his accommodation, he did a couple of hours each evening doing games with the children. He also attended short placements in the probation service and in a school in the UK as part of the course.

14.213 At the end of the year, he was offered a job in St Joseph's and took up the position in September 1972. He explained:

I was approached by Sr Astrid and asked if I would be interested in taking over the group of boys in St Joseph's, that they were going to put all the boys together and once the holidays came in June, that they would be splitting that mixed group up and changing that unit to a boys' unit and I could take it over as the team leader there, if you like.

Mr Pleece said that, although he would have had regular contact with social workers, volunteers and two other Sisters in the Community who worked in the unit, it was Sr Astrid who was most in contact with him:

I suppose Sr Astrid was the one that would have had her finger on anything that was going on in the unit. You must remember that Sr Astrid was a mother figure to all of the children in St Joseph's. The boys, I mean, idolised her. When she came over, like, it was an event every time because they all wanted to speak to her and give her a hug and whatever, you know. She was wonderful with the children.

- 14.214** Thomas Pleece left St Joseph's between September 1973 and April 1974 and went to work in Drogheda, where he was offered a job which paid slightly better than St Joseph's. He paid one visit to Kilkenny during the time he worked in Drogheda, and became aware that the children were not happy with his replacement. Sr Astrid met him and they discussed the possibility of his coming back. He agreed, provided she could match his salary in Drogheda. He returned to Kilkenny in April 1974 and remained there until 1976.

Sr Wilma

- 14.215** From 1964, Sr Wilma lived in St Joseph's Convent in Kilkenny and worked in Kilkenny Social Services. She had daily contact with the Sisters in the Community. She assisted in the establishment of the childcare course in Kilkenny in 1971.

- 14.216** She recalled that Thomas Pleece attended the first childcare course in Kilkenny and was the first layman to do the course. She interviewed him with all the other applicants. He satisfactorily completed the course and she was sure she would have recommended him to the Sister in charge in St Joseph's, although she did not remember specifically doing so. She recalled he was a good student and had impressed on the course. Once Thomas Pleece started to work in St Joseph's, she had no contact with him. She may have met him once or twice in the grounds but had no real contact. In her Garda statement, she recalled he had an Alsatian dog which she was terrified of. She did not remember discussing his progress in St Joseph's. Sr Astrid did not tell her about his dismissal or the circumstances surrounding it. She did not know why he left and never enquired about it.

Richard Evans²²

- 14.217** Richard Evans did part-time work at St Joseph's five nights per week. He helped the children with sport and homework, and did leisure supervision. He recalled the boys coming to him with allegations that they were being interfered with by Thomas Pleece:

It was in the spring of '74 ... After a lot of conversation with the boys, a lot of cajoling, they came to me and they were saying that Mr Pleece was abusing them. The way they put it was he was interfering with them when they were in bed at night ... Joe,²³ Simon²⁴ and Justin,²⁵ and there was a few more of them. They didn't want to go to tell anybody because they knew they were going to be punished if they did. They were going to suffer repercussions. Because there was an awful lot of abuse going on that I knew nothing about, physical and sexual, and I knew nothing about it. I wouldn't have known anything about it at the time.

- 14.218** The boys complained again:

After about two, three weeks they came back to me again and they were afraid to go at the start and said they wouldn't go to report it to anybody, there was no one going to listen to them. I said, 'What's the harm in going over and telling the Reverend Mother anyway? ... They were complaining about Thomas Pleece interfering with them in bed, their private parts, interfering with them, taking them out of bed and bringing them to his

²² This is a pseudonym.

²³ This is a pseudonym.

²⁴ This is a pseudonym.

²⁵ This is a pseudonym.

room and that sort of stuff ... I listened to what they were saying and I said, "We'll have to do something about it. We need to tell somebody this is going on, that it needs to stop". Even at that stage they still weren't prepared to, you know, to make it public that they were going to go to somebody in authority ... I think a lot of it was the fact that if Thomas Pleece found out about it they would get more abuse, they would get physical abuse.

14.219 Mr Evans was aware that someone in authority needed to be told what was going on:

I asked them would they jointly come over to see the Reverend Mother and I would make an appointment for them to meet her. I don't know what night of the week or anything. Joe was the only one who decided he would come with me. We rang the doorbell over in the main building and I looked for the Reverend Mother and we went into the parlour, Joe, myself and the Reverend Mother. I can remember it so clearly. I sat on the left-hand side, Joe sat in front of me and the Reverend Mother was on my right. I would say for half an hour, three quarters of an hour we talked about the general interference and Joe, as a young lad of that age, was not prepared to turn around and say he's touching me or feeling my private parts or naming the parts or what he was doing but he was interfering is the way he put it. It was vague enough and probably gives as much as I would give at that stage either.

14.220 He said that Sr Astrid listened, but asked no questions about what was being communicated to her:

She listened, didn't say an awful lot. I vaguely recollect that she said, "Well, I'll look into it". There was something of that – something close to that ... I think the words she used were that "I will do something about it" or – I don't know what way it was put but we left saying there was something going to happen. That was my impression leaving.

14.221 Mr Evans recalled saying something to Thomas Pleece after he had spoken with Sr Astrid:

... But after the occasion of going seeing the Reverend Mother with Joe I remember saying something – Now, I can't remember exactly what I said, but I think I said it to Thomas Pleece that if you are interfering with them boys, "You shouldn't be interfering with them boys", or "You should leave them alone" or "What the hell is going on" or something of that nature I said to him. His reaction was "What business is it of yours?" or "You are only such and such, what the hell are you going to do about it?" or something like that.

14.222 Whatever was said, Thomas Pleece resented Richard Evans after that:

Now, Thomas Pleece always had an Alsatian and that was his main threat with everybody, the Alsatian would be put on you or set on you if you opened your mouth or stepped in the wrong place. He did resent me after that. It was quite obvious that he must have known or found out we had gone to the Reverend Mother and he wasn't happy about it. I don't think after that occasion that I ever spoke to him after that.

14.223 Mr Evans described Sr Astrid as being 'ferociously calm about the whole thing'. She did not say much or express horror at what she was being told. He was, however, quite sure that something would be done about it. He said: 'I think I spoke to [another nun] at one stage about it'.

14.224 Sr Astrid had maintained that she had no recollection of anyone speaking to her about sexual abuse by Thomas Pleece, consequently Richard Evans was asked to spell out how explicit he had been with her:

Well, I originally stated to the Reverend Mother that Thomas Pleece was putting his hands in under the bedclothes in interfering with the boys' private parts and that Joe was there to make a complaint. He didn't particularly say that Pleece was catching them, feeling their penises or anything but he was interfering with them under the clothes, their private

parts I think is the way he put it. But there was no mention of other than that. From what has transpired since that, there was an awful lot worse than that going on. But that didn't come out with Sr Astrid that night.

14.225 Though the boys had not been explicit even with Richard Evans, he had no doubt that what was happening was wrong and had to be stopped:

I knew it was wrong, what was going on. What they had said to me was wrong, it shouldn't have been going on there.

14.226 He went on to say:

I didn't even understand up to the time we had gone to the Reverend Mother the full extent of what they were saying to me. I only knew that interfering with boys in bed was wrong and an older man interfering with boys was wrong. But the full extent of it I definitely would say I didn't understand.

14.227 He was asked whether he had considered going to the Gardaí, and he replied:

No, not at that time. Ever since that, ever since I have heard that there was nothing ever happened about it, and the extremes of it and the extent of it, I live with the fact that I made major mistakes myself as an individual of 20, 22 years of age, I should have went, instead of going to the Reverend Mother, I should have went to the Garda, I should have went to the Health Board, I should have went a whole lot of places, but I didn't.

14.228 The evidence of the witness was that the fact that the boys were being sexually interfered with was undoubtedly stated to Sr Astrid and that she would have understood that there was more going on than was being described to her.

14.229 That meeting between Joe, Richard Evans and Sr Astrid took place at the beginning of the spring of 1974, some months after Thomas Pleece had been brought back to Kilkenny from his eight-month period of employment in Drogheda.

14.230 Richard Evans did not work in Kilkenny during that summer of 1974, and when he returned he was not assigned to Summerhill, the house run by Mr Pleece. Instead, he worked in the main house with younger boys. He said that he did not enquire whether things had been resolved but, some time later, he met one of the boys in town on Saturday. He asked him *'has anything happened up there since?'*, and the boy responded, *'Not a thing, it got worse'*.

14.231 Mr Pleece continued to work as a care worker in Summerhill until 1976.

The evidence of Thomas Pleece

14.232 Mr Pleece gave his own account of the circumstances of his leaving in 1976 to the Investigation Committee:

Well, I was just reading Sr Astrid's account of what happened, but her recollection is a little wrong in some respects. First of all, a problem had arisen in St Joseph's that I didn't know about. There had been a complaint made against me. I didn't know this, but one morning I got a message from Sr Astrid that I wasn't to send the children to school, that I was to bring them over to the convent, to the parlour. There was two big rooms in the convent. Which I did, and other members of staff were there as well. There were two other members of staff. So they were all there. All the boys were all put into the one room. I wasn't told anything of what was happening. The boys were being brought into another

room one by one. I was later to learn that – because I was the last person to go in and it was Dr Black²⁶ that was interviewing each boy and every member of staff.

14.233 Thomas Pleece said that Dr Black asked him how he was getting on, and whether he had any problems in the School. He then told Mr Pleece that there had been a complaint against him:

He told me that there was a complaint. He didn't say what the complaint was, he just said there was a complaint and that they were looking into it. He found that he didn't find any credence in what the lads had said, and everything was fine, you know.

14.234 Mr Pleece went back to his unit after this interview with the doctor and resumed his duties. He added:

It was about a week later or maybe two weeks later, I am not 100% sure, that I met Sr Astrid in the yard. She told me that – what she said was the boys were saying things about me and that she wasn't very happy and that she had – actually she had said – after the interview with Dr Black, that next morning, she did mention about that there was a complaint made but that she thought everything was going to be okay now because Dr Black had vindicated any allegation that was made.

14.235 Mr Pleece stated to the Committee that he presumed that the complaint made and referred to by Dr Black and Sr Astrid was one of sexual abuse:

You know, this is where the misconception was. I thought she was talking about the sexual abuse. I never dreamed that she was talking about physical abuse. She was under the impression, obviously, that it was physical abuse, you know ... I just took it for granted that one of the lads had said that I had abused them. Especially if it was Joe.

14.236 Mr Pleece asked Sr Astrid whether he was being sacked:

I asked her did she want me to leave and she said, well, it might be better for everybody concerned if I was to leave. I did say to her, "Are you sacking me, am I getting the sack?" Because I wouldn't have been too happy about that. She said, "Well, no, if you are resigning, that's fine, there's no problem".

14.237 At all times, Thomas Pleece presumed that Sr Astrid had received a complaint about sexual abuse. He had been sexually abusing the boys and, in particular, had abused Joe, who he knew had made the complaint. It was only when he heard Sr Astrid's statement to the Commission, that she had had no complaints of sexual abuse, that he questioned this assumption. At no time was the subject matter of the complaint raised with him. All he was ever told, by both Sr Astrid and Dr Black, was that a complaint had been made. No details of the complaint were ever spelt out to him.

14.238 He described his interview with Dr Black:

He was asking general questions about the discipline in the unit and how I disciplined the boys, and what kind of problems were arising out of that. I was talking to him for about half an hour, you know.

14.239 Thomas Pleece agreed that the whole investigation conducted by Dr Black was a momentous occasion and he was worried. He had refused the older boys permission to smoke and that had caused problems but, because the complaint against him had come from Joe, a boy he had actually abused, he presumed the issue was sexual abuse:

Well I had understood that that's what he said to Sr Astrid because I was just putting two and two together when she said to me there was a complaint. There couldn't be anything else because there was no physical abuse.

²⁶ This is a pseudonym.

14.240 Although Thomas Pleece disputed the extent of the abuse he perpetrated on Joe, he acknowledged that abuse had occurred:

You see because I went into Joe's room and I fondled him, and I committed abuse on him, when I was confronted by Sr Astrid by a complaint I immediately thought that's what it was, that Joe had said to her that I had gone into his room. So he was right, like, that part of it was right.

14.241 It was Thomas Pleece's understanding that Dr Black had been asked by Sr Astrid to investigate allegations of sexual abuse, and had found no evidence against him. Dr Black did not spell out the complaint against him, and Thomas Pleece was afraid to ask.

14.242 Thomas Pleece denied absolutely that he ever physically abused boys:

Well, in regard to physical abuse – I mean, I don't mind the boys claiming that I abused them sexually, you know, the three lads that I involved myself with. But for any boy to say that I physically abused them, I deny that completely.

14.243 He said he only ever laid a hand on boys for three reasons: one, if he was in danger from another boy; two, if a boy was about to self-harm, he would restrain him; and three, in self-defence, which he said never arose. Therefore, when Sr Astrid tackled him, the thought of physical abuse did not enter his head because he had not done it. The only thing she could have been talking about was sexual abuse, which he had done.

14.244 Thomas Pleece left St Joseph's within a day or two of Sr Astrid speaking with him:

But I know that she was calling a halt, anyway, to me working with the boys. I would have put the lads to bed that night and I would have said that I was leaving. I think that there was only two weeks or something to the summer holidays or something like that.

14.245 He was paid up to the summer and was given to understand by Sr Astrid that he would get a reference. Although he left believing he had been accused of sexually abusing boys, he stated that he left on good terms. He came back to reunions at Christmas and the like for years afterwards, and the invitations for this were extended by the Convent. He said: *'I know I left under a cloud in Kilkenny. But I left, as I thought, on good terms'*.

14.246 Thomas Pleece continued in jobs that brought him into close contact with vulnerable young people and children.

14.247 In September 1977, Thomas Pleece got a job in a probation hostel in Cork which accommodated boys in their late teens. He assumed they would have sought a reference from St Joseph's for him there, although he did not see one.

14.248 He and his wife applied to foster two young boys in 1978. They were vetted before being accepted. He said that it never crossed his mind that the fact that he had been asked to leave for sexual abuse in Kilkenny was a disadvantage to his application for foster children:

We had a number of interviews with the social worker, I don't know how many there was now, but there was quite a few, and we were in the office another day and there was maybe three people there, and we had interviews with the head social worker, and the social worker that had been interviewing us. That was about it. They passed us to foster.

14.249 He assumed that they would have contacted his previous employers but, as this was during the period when he still had regular contact with Sr Astrid and the convent, he was not concerned that he would not be given a reference by them.

14.250 He did not link his sexual abuse at work with fostering children:

You see those kind of things didn't enter into one's head at the time. Abuse wasn't – I didn't see it as abuse ... Well, the only thing I was to reassure myself was that it wouldn't happen again, ever. That's the assurance I had to give myself, in any other job, because I wasn't going to let this happen again because I knew I wouldn't survive a second one ... Yes, in a job situation. That I would never, ever cross the line again, you know, which I didn't.

14.251 Mr Pleece subjected the two fostered boys to a horrific ordeal of sexual abuse once they had become teenagers, but he did not abuse again, according to himself, in his employment. In his Garda statement, he admitted to abusing the boys from when they were about 11 to 15 or 16.

14.252 The hostel in Cork closed down in 1979, and Mr Pleece was offered a job in the detention centre run by the Oblate Fathers in Lusk and for this he required references from previous employers. He gave St Joseph's as a reference because he had asked Sr Astrid if there was going to be a problem with references before he left and he understood from her that he would be okay on that front. At the interview for Lusk he was asked why he resigned from St Joseph's and explained it by saying he resigned to take a 'year out' from childcare.

14.253 He worked in Lusk until 1985, when it closed down, and then was out of work for a period until he took up another post in Ballymun, also in childcare. He worked there for two years. Then he worked in a home for children in Dublin as Assistant Manager, and was arrested while still employed there.

14.254 As well as the two boys he and his wife fostered, they also adopted two children. Again, they were subjected to a rigorous investigation process before the adoptions were sanctioned. His employment record would have been made available, but it is not clear whether any direct contact was made with St Joseph's as to his suitability.

Evidence of Dr Black

14.255 Dr Black worked for the Brothers of Charity in Belmont Park between 1972 and 1976, and his job at the time involved the assessment of children with behavioural problems. This work brought him in regular contact with St Joseph's, Kilkenny, and he knew Sr Astrid well. He estimated that he would visit St Joseph's about 15 times a year. He had no recollection of being asked by Sr Astrid to conduct an inquiry or try to find out why some of the boys in Summerhill were unhappy. The mode of inquiry that Thomas Pleece said had taken place would have taken much longer than an afternoon visit. He could not have questioned more than one or two boys in that space of time. As far as he was concerned, he never carried out this alleged investigation.

14.256 On the question of the more casual inquiry suggested by Sr Astrid, he said that he would not have used the phrase that she '*had nothing to worry about*'. He would have said that he could find no evidence of the alleged offence. In addition, Dr Black said that he would most likely have written a report, which he would have left in St Joseph's.

14.257 Although he visited a number of residential schools during his time as a psychiatrist, Dr Black said that he had never had a complaint of physical or sexual abuse from any child ever. He said that this was not surprising to him, as he did not really get to know the children well enough for them to trust him.

Sr Astrid

14.258 Sr Astrid stated that she had no memory of a meeting with Richard Evans and Joe in which Thomas Pleece's sexual abuse of the boys was raised. She remembered that Joe came to see

her once or twice, but did not remember Mr Evans accompanying him. She did not disagree with Mr Evan's recollection, as she believed he was an honest man, but she did not remember it herself.

- 14.259** Sr Astrid was asked if she made Thomas Pleece aware in 1976 that Joe had made allegations of a sexual nature against him, as stated by him in his Garda statement. She replied, '*No, that never – I have no recollection of that*'. Thomas Pleece also said that Dr Black was brought in to conduct an inquiry. She was asked if she had brought Dr Black in to carry out an inquiry. She replied:

Dr Black came regularly to St Joseph's, he was just on his way to the – he called regularly to see us in St Joseph's, to see had we any problems and usually he saw some of the girls. At that particular time the lads were inclined to run away a bit and come back to me and tell me he was tormenting them or at them. Well, I said wouldn't – now he was come at that particular time and I said would you have a chat with the boys and see how they are, have they any special reason for running away.

- 14.260** She agreed that a number of boys had complained to her that Thomas Pleece was 'at them', which she understood to mean beating them or punishing them. On the particular occasion when she dismissed Thomas Pleece, it was one boy who came. That boy was Simon. She was surprised by her use of the term 'abuse' in her Garda statement: '*abusing is there, but at that stage I knew nothing about abuse, sex abuse; that's the truth*'.

- 14.261** She realised something was wrong, in the sense that she thought the beating was more than usual. Simon told her '*we are not able to stick it*'.

- 14.262** To the question why Thomas Pleece was asked to leave, she replied:

Well, when Simon told me that day in the yard, you know, that it was very bad. "We can't stick it," I said, "Well I'll have to go to Thomas Pleece myself". I went to Thomas Pleece that very day myself and said to him "you can't stay here any longer because the boys are very unhappy".

- 14.263** Sr Astrid was asked how often she had spoken to Thomas Pleece about being too rough with the children before she had dismissed him. She said it happened a few times:

You see I'd have to go over to him when the lads were run away or anything and they'd be coming to me. I'd have to go over and say " ... there is something wrong with this the lads shouldn't be afraid of you and you shouldn't be beating them". Then eventually he'd take them back, sure some of them wouldn't even go back I would have to take them down to one of the houses. One particular lad, he said "I won't go back to him now, Sister". I said, "all right, sure come on for a night or two but it will be harder on you then when you do go back." But after a few days talking to him and that I'd take him back.

- 14.264** Sr Astrid said that this had '*probably happened a few times*' and remembered big groups of boys being involved.

- 14.265** Notwithstanding her decision to remove Thomas Pleece immediately, Sr Astrid was adamant that she had not been told of sexual abuse.

- 14.266** In 1979, less than three years after Mr Pleece had been dispatched from St Joseph's, a letter was sent to Sr Astrid by the Department of Education looking for a reference. It said:

I wish to refer to Mr. Thomas Pleece, who has been offered a post as Housemaster in Scoil Ard Mhuire, Lusk, Co Dublin. Mr. Pleece has claimed service in your residential home from 1972 to 1976. Perhaps you would be good enough to state;

1. the nature of the post occupied by Mr. Pleece;

2. whether service was full-time and satisfactory;
3. the first and last date of service.

14.267 Sr Astrid replied by stating that Thomas Pleece had worked in St Joseph's as a House Parent from 1972 until 1976. Nothing in her reply indicated any difficulty with Mr Pleece, in spite of the clear invitation at 2 above to express any reservations she might have. She said:

I suppose one thing I wasn't good at writing letters myself, but I don't know why I wrote such a short note; that I didn't say he wasn't satisfactory.

14.268 She said that she would have said on the telephone that she would not have had Thomas Pleece back in St Joseph's:

I did. I had told him on the phone you see, that was the trouble. They rang me up, you know, for a reference ... Well the information I gave on the telephone, that I wouldn't employ, re-admit Thomas Pleece or that I wouldn't have him.

14.269 She went on to say:

I remember getting phone calls from different places where Thomas Pleece applied when he left St Joseph's. I know the only answer I ever gave was "I wouldn't have Thomas Pleece back in St [Joseph's]" – or I wouldn't reply.

14.270 Sr Astrid confirmed that she did not think Thomas Pleece was suitable to work with children because she believed that he was severe with them.

- 14.271**
- **Mr Evans' account of his meeting with Sr Astrid and Mr Pleece's account of his departure are consistent with an allegation of sexual abuse.**
 - **Had Mr Pleece's behaviour been identified and acknowledged, other children would have been spared abuse and suffering.**
 - **Having dismissed Thomas Pleece, Sr Astrid should not have given him a reference for another job that would bring him into contact with children.**

Peter Tade

14.272 Peter Tade was convicted and sentenced to four years in prison at Kilkenny Circuit Criminal Court on 9th June 1998. He died in prison in 1999 before the hearings into St Joseph's took place.

14.273 Sr Astrid recalled that, after Mr Pleece's removal, there was a staff shortage in St Joseph's.

14.274 Sr Astrid said:

When Thomas Pleece was gone I immediately rang the Department. I told Mr. Granville that I had dismissed Thomas Pleece and would he kindly come down to help me to put an ad in the paper and have the right salary. He came down, we wrote the ad, I posted it to the paper. Then when the people applied, came in, I told him that we had so many, but there was only one qualified person. I said "would you come down to interview if he [is] a state qualified person?" And he did. He came down to the parlour and the two of us interviewed Peter Tade.

14.275 According to Sr Astrid, Peter Tade was an elderly man and had great references. He was a very religious and serious man. Both she and Mr Granville agreed that he should be offered the job.

14.276 A trainee care worker, Donal Kavanagh,²⁷ who was in Summerhill at the time of Thomas Pleece's removal, gave evidence about the events which led to his resignation from St Joseph's in 1977.

14.277 He had returned to Ireland in 1976 having spent some time abroad and began to assist in St Joseph's teaching sports to the boys on three evening a week. This was done on a voluntary basis, as he was acquainted with a female volunteer who worked with the children in St Joseph's. He was asked to work in the Summerhill unit following the sudden departure of Thomas Pleece. He did not have a formal interview for the job. He did not know Thomas Pleece but was simply asked to step into his unit until they found a replacement for him. Initially, he worked alone, with the assistance of a Sister who did the cooking.

14.278 After some months, around August 1976, Peter Tade arrived and was appointed as a House Parent, and Mr Kavanagh became his assistant. Five months later, Donal Kavanagh resigned and wrote a letter of resignation which stated:

Dear Rev Mother,

Please accept this as my letter of resignation. I leave for the following reasons: Having two house fathers in Summerhill might work under different circumstances; but in the case of Mr Tade and I it is not working. I feel and fear that at the present time Mr Tade is neither mentally nor emotionally stable enough to give the boys the security and example they need. Furthermore I feel the situation in Summerhill at the moment is highly undesirable and unsafe.

This is not a hasty or reckless judgment, but an opinion formed after working in close proximity with Mr Tade for four months, and it is not without great thought and extreme reluctance that I now bring these matters to your attention; but as my first responsibility is to the boys in all conscience I must.

Having been assured that there is no chance of transferring to another group, I must therefore with even greater reluctance submit this, my resignation.

Yours sincerely,

14.279 A copy of this letter was sent to the Bishop, Dr Birch.

14.280 Soon after he took up his post as Housemaster, Mr Kavanagh observed that Mr Tade shouted and screamed at the boys. He was very volatile. Some of the boys complained to him that Mr Tade came into their rooms at night, especially after he had had a few drinks. They complained that he was physically abusive to them. Mr Kavanagh challenged Mr Tade about the boys' complaints. Mr Tade denied any wrongdoing, and Mr Kavanagh initially accepted his word. Subsequently, the boys came to him again and said that things were worse because he had spoken to Mr Tade. He then reported it to Sr Astrid, and she seemed quite shocked by what he told her and said she would do something about it. He met her on at least two occasions. The second time he told her that the boys were continually complaining that nothing had been done, and he felt he could not continue working in the unit with Mr Tade and sought a transfer.

14.281 Mr Kavanagh explained that, at that time, he was in his mid-20s, with almost no experience in childcare. However, he knew the difference between right and wrong, and he believed the children were being beaten and he was concerned for them. He decided he would have to resign.

14.282 He spoke with Sr Wilma and told her that the boys were being physically abused. He believed this conversation took place soon after he tendered his letter of resignation. He believed that he told her only about physical abuse, as it never occurred to him that they were being sexually abused.

²⁷ This is a pseudonym.

- 14.283** After he resigned, he continued to worry about the children. He had an introduction to the Bishop of Ossory and a meeting was arranged. The Bishop was very concerned about what he was being told, and Mr Kavanagh believed that the Bishop saw Sr Astrid and the Mother Superior, and may have discussed this with Sr Wilma.
- 14.284** Sr Astrid was asked for a reference for both Mr Thomas Pleece and Mr Donal Kavanagh, and she gave them the following reference:
- 21st August, 1979,
- Dear Sir,
- With reference to your letters of 16th August re
1. Mr. Thomas Pleece
 2. Mr. Donal Kavanagh
- Both men were in employment here as
1. Housefather
 2. Trainee Child Care Worker
- respectively during the periods mentioned.
- With good wishes,
- Yours sincerely – Sr Astrid
- 14.285** In the course of her evidence, Sr Astrid was shown a copy of Donal Kavanagh's letter of resignation, which was written in January 1977. She was asked what her understanding of that letter had been. She told the Committee that she was glad when she got Mr Kavanagh's letter that he was leaving and she explained to the Committee that she had not really read his letter properly at the time – she believed he had not written it himself:
- I admit I didn't read the letter properly. I had never got a complaint from anybody. None of the boys said anything about Peter Tade to me.*
- 14.286** She said that she did not trust Donal Kavanagh, although she did not explain why. She agreed that it was almost impossible to get care workers at that time, either qualified or unqualified, but she still did not want to retain Mr Kavanagh, who had asked for a move away from Peter Tade. Mr Kavanagh surmised that her antipathy stemmed from his desire to unionise the workforce in St Joseph's.
- 14.287** She said she never discussed the letter with Bishop Birch and never met him about it. It was only on reading the letter more recently that she understood that he was trying to help the boys but, at the time, she was happy to see the back of Donal Kavanagh.
- 14.288** Sr Astrid denied that Donal Kavanagh had ever approached her previously about Peter Tade's behaviour. The first she knew about it was when she got his letter of resignation.
- 14.289** Sr Astrid said that she showed Mr Kavanagh's letter to Graham Granville at the time, although Mr Granville had no recollection of it.
- 14.290** She said that she did not know what Peter Tade did after leaving St Joseph's. She believed that, because he was quite an old man, he would not have worked in childcare again. She confirmed that she had never been approached for a reference for him.

14.291 Sr Astrid was asked whether she would have sacked Peter Tade if she knew he had been shouting at boys and beating boys. Her reply was, *'Well, I would have spoken to him about it ... No I wouldn't have sacked him, no'*.

14.292 At the time of Donal Kavanagh's resignation, Sr Astrid said that she had received no complaints about Peter Tade but, six months later, a complaint of sexual abuse was made to her. She told a Garda about the allegation, and asked him to accompany her to Dublin to confront Peter Tade about it.

14.293 The Garda worked as a volunteer in St Joseph's, Kilkenny. He became involved through another Garda, who did similar work with the children and encouraged him to get involved. Both these men became friends and confidantes to Sr Astrid.

14.294 Sr Astrid appeared to take a back seat in the questioning of Peter Tade. She said that the words 'sex abuse' were not used, but that Tade admitted to improper behaviour:

When [the Garda] was questioning him. Whatever he was saying to – I took it that there was something improper going on. He didn't use the word sex abuse ...

14.295 She said all the questioning was about the one incident:

It was all about that incident. But that incident didn't seem very serious really ... It didn't. The little boy had a sore bottom or something and he looked at it.

14.296 She was asked why, if the incident did not seem serious, she had travelled to Dublin and asked the Garda to accompany her in order to confront Peter Tade. She gave no clear answer to that, although she did say that, once Peter Tade had made his admission, she had told him not to return to St Joseph's. Nevertheless, she was clearly concerned enough at the initial complaint to move fairly quickly to talk to Peter Tade.

14.297 The Garda gave evidence to the Committee. He had no involvement with Thomas Pleece but he did recall Peter Tade as a care worker in St Joseph's. He remembered that a complaint was made by Gerry,²⁸ who was the son of a family who befriended children in St Joseph's.

14.298 Peter Tade used to take Richard,²⁹ who was a boy in care in St Joseph's, and Gerry on fishing trips and for spins in his car. Peter Tade took photographs of them. The Garda described what happened:

the circumstances were that Peter Tade had taken photographs of Richard and Gerry. He used to take them fishing and took them for spins in his car. But Gerry's mother discovered that Peter Tade's face, he was in one of the photographs, had been scratched and pins driven through it and she suspected something was wrong. She spoke to him and he told her that Peter Tade did something to him. As far as I recall it was a bank holiday weekend and Peter Tade was off, he was on leave and he was in Dublin, Sr Astrid said she had to get rid of him or ask him to leave. I came to Dublin with her – or I came to Dublin and I met her in Dublin.

14.299 The Garda had met Gerry's parents before he left, and they were not anxious to make a formal complaint. They did not want any publicity whatever about their son. The term 'sexual abuse' was not used, but the Garda was in no doubt that an indecent assault had taken place.

²⁸ This is a pseudonym.

²⁹ This is a pseudonym.

- 14.300** When confronted by Sr Astrid and the Garda, Peter Tade admitted that he had abused Gerry. He admitted that he touched the child improperly. Sr Astrid told him he could never return to St Joseph's or have any contact with the children there.
- 14.301** The Garda did not take a statement from Sr Astrid at the time, on the basis that there was no formal complaint from Gerry's parents, despite the fact that he had an admission from Peter Tade himself. He also did not question any of the children who had been in the care of Peter Tade for the previous 10 months in St Joseph's, and he did not think that Sr Astrid had done so either. As far as he was concerned, it was an isolated incident that had been dealt with. Peter Tade left for England, and there were no more complaints about him. He said he wrote a short report for his Superintendent that Peter Tade had been dismissed from St Joseph's for an incident. He never saw that report again.
- 14.302** He said that it was 1995 before he realised that the incident with Gerry was not an isolated one, and Peter Tade had been abusing boys in St Joseph's since he had arrived 10 months previously.
- 14.303** He felt he knew the children in St Joseph's well, and regretted that they did not trust him enough to confide in him. He admitted that there was an awareness of a certain amount of sexual activity between the children.
- 14.304** Neither the Garda nor Sr Astrid saw fit to question Richard, the boy from St Joseph's who was with Gerry in the defaced photograph, and who had also been taken on the trips with Peter Tade, about whether he had been interfered with by Tade. It is difficult to understand why they did not question the other boys in the home where Tade had worked for 10 months. There was a failure on the part of both the Garda and Sr Astrid to face up to the danger Peter Tade posed to other children.
- 14.305** Peter Tade died whilst serving the four-year sentence imposed on him by the Circuit Criminal Court in 1999. He had pleaded guilty to seven counts of indecent assault against three former residents of St Joseph's and Gerry, the boy who had made the complaint in 1977.
- 14.306** Peter Tade had given a full statement to the investigating Garda in 1995, in which he had described being sexually abused by a family friend at seven years of age. In the mid-1960s, whilst working in a boys' club in England, he had first abused a boy of 14 years. He was over 30 at the time. He had abused more children after that and, in 1967, took his first job in childcare. He described a series of incidents of abuse of young boys aged from about 11 to 14. He worked in a number of residential homes, but his activities were never uncovered.
- 14.307** He returned to Ireland to take up the job in Kilkenny in 1976, and his pattern of abuse continued. He listed a number of boys that he had sexually abused in Kilkenny and a number of boys he had physically abused.
- 14.308** After his encounter with Sr Astrid, he returned to England and continued his abusive behaviour until, one day, a boy he had been abusing for over two years finally told the housemaster of the school he was working in. He denied the abuse and was acquitted by Middlesborough Crown Court in 1988.
- 14.309** By 1995, he had moved back to Ireland and when confronted by the investigating Garda he admitted abusing boys in Kilkenny.
- 14.310** When Peter Tade was sentenced, the Sister of Charity issued a statement as follows:
- the first complaint we received about Peter Tade concerning sexual abuse was made on a weekend in June, 1977, when Peter Tade was away in Dublin. One of the children

made a specific complaint of abuse against him to the sister in charge, she immediately called in a local Garda who was involved with St. Joseph's in a voluntary capacity and they both travelled to Dublin to confront Peter Tade. This confrontation resulted in his immediate dismissal. Peter Tade never returned to St. Joseph's.

14.311 Two volunteer workers who were in St Joseph's during Thomas Pleece's and Peter Tade's time there said they had no idea that these men were abusing children.

14.312 A third man, however, had been told about sexual abuse in the School. Patrick McGovern³⁰ helped out in St Joseph's on a voluntary basis with the entertainment in the School. He had a fair amount of contact with the School, and would call in and play music for the children. In or around 1974, a friend of his asked him to meet his daughter who was working in the School. She said to him that one of the boys was being molested in bed in the School. He understood that it was sexual molestation. He called to the convent and told Sr Wilma about this:

I did, I called to the convent. It was dark, miserable weather, I can remember it well, being on the front step of the convent, there was a light over the door, it was really Dickensian, I knocked on the door and Sr Wilma came out. I knew her more than I knew the other nuns so I was glad it was her that answered the door.

14.313 He continued:

I said to you her, I said I have had a bad complaint, and she said – well bad complaints to her would be a daily thing, she would have to hear it first before she'd agree it was bad. So I said to her I have a report that there is a boy being molested, and she just took a step back and said, [Patrick] you can, as sure as you are standing there, that's not the word she used, it doesn't happen. They have a habit of – or there is a history there of boys and girls making up stories to gain attention. I said is that the way it is? She said that's the way it is. So I said thanks very much, and I went back to the person, the young girl I spoke to earlier on and said nothing is going to be done, it is not going to be followed through, because we know now there was reason to follow it through.

14.314 He said that, after speaking with Sr Wilma, he was satisfied that nothing further would be done about the complaint:

No, she made it plain to me that nothing was going on. So I respected her a great deal, I have to say that at that stage, and I was happy that what she was saying was exactly how things were, that there was nothing going on. It was only when evidence came up later that I was annoyed that I didn't do more

14.315 He came forward in 1995 and made a formal statement to the Gardaí in relation to this when he read the revelations about abuse in the newspapers.

Sr Wilma

14.316 Sr Wilma told the Committee that she only knew Peter Tade to see around the grounds of St Joseph's. She remembered Donal Kavanagh, as she knew him from around Kilkenny and she knew his family. She recalled Donal Kavanagh complaining to her that Peter Tade was physically abusing the children. He did this in the context of speaking to her about doing the childcare course and, in the course of that discussion, he mentioned that Peter Tade slapped the children. She remembered telling him that he should go to Sr Astrid about it.

14.317 In her interview with the Gardaí in December 1995, she stated: 'I picked up on it that he might have been sexually abusing them as well'. In her evidence to the Commission, Sr Wilma corrected

³⁰ This is a pseudonym.

that statement. She said she made a mistake in her Garda statement, and that she could not possibly have known about sexual abuse back in 1970 when Donal Kavanagh spoke to her. She did know about incest and men interfering with girls, but she knew nothing about men interfering with boys. She also suggested in her evidence that her statement to the Gardaí was somewhat informal, and not as formal as the signed document would suggest. It took place in her solicitor's office.

14.318 She said she did not personally arrange for Mr Kavanagh to see the Bishop, but found out later that he did see him. Her action was to tell him to talk to Sr Astrid about the complaint, and she would have taken no further action in regard to the matter. As far as she was concerned, Sr Astrid was in charge of the matter and would have been dealing with it properly.

14.319 Sr Wilma told the Committee that, back in the 1970s, if she was told that an adult was molesting a child, she would not have interpreted that as meaning some kind of inappropriate activity. Patrick McGovern gave evidence that he complained to her that one of the boys was being molested by a care worker. She had no recollection of it at all. Patrick McGovern said that her response was to dismiss it as not having happened. She said that, even if she had been told, she would have done nothing more than tell them to go to the person in charge of the Institution.

14.320 She said in response to questioning that she did not find it at all extraordinary that, when Peter Tade was sacked for interfering with a boy who was visiting the School, it was not discussed among the Sisters in the Community. It was the business of people in residential care and *'we did not discuss our works, we simply didn't'*.

14.321 She continued:

it wasn't extraordinary at that time, it wasn't extraordinary that I did not know about Peter Tade. It wasn't extraordinary at all. It was normal. When it came to our works and this was about work, this was about Sr Astrid area of work. When it came to our works I may as well have been living in Kerry as living in St Joseph's. That's reality.

14.322 Despite running the childcare course in residential care in Kilkenny, she was living with a residential institution on her doorstep, and she knew nothing about what was going on inside it. Sr Wilma attended a number of meetings with Bishop Birch and the Department of Education. She also signed a report on proposed changes about to take place in St Joseph's. She acknowledged that a newspaper article written by her in 1999, which asserted that she had nothing whatsoever to do with St Joseph's, was not entirely accurate.

Other allegations of abuse

14.323 In the course of the Garda investigation in 1995, a female care worker admitted to sexually assaulting a number of boys in the School by taking them into her bed and fondling them. She said she was 16 years old at the time and was unaware that what she was doing was wrong. The boys were seven or eight at the time. Once she got older, she realised that this was wrong.

14.324 Sr Astrid recalled another bizarre incident. Some time around 1966 or 1967, young deacons from St Kieran's College came to St Joseph's to help with the children. A year or two later, towards the end of the 1960s, some of these students came to Summerhill to supervise the boys at night time. She was told that the students, she believed there were four involved, and the boys in Summerhill were running around naked. She did not see it herself but told the Garda about it. He reported it to the President of St Kieran's, who in turn informed the Dean of Students. She said that she herself spoke to the President of the college about the incident, and the students did not return to St Joseph's after that. She did not mention this incident to anyone and none of the children made any complaints. Sr Astrid commented that, although she did not think that there was any question

of sexual abuse in this incident, she was sufficiently worried to speak to the Garda and to discuss it with the President of the College:

But I didn't, you see the trouble with me was I didn't know about sexual abuse, you see. That was the trouble with me.

14.325 She did not agree that she buried her head in the sand on this issue.

The Kilkenny childcare course

14.326 The Sisters of Charity were the first Congregation to establish a training course for people involved in childcare. The course was first held in 1971 and was attended mainly by religious.

14.327 Sr Wilma said the idea came from Bishop Birch, and she drew up an outline for the course which was presented to the Department of Education. They agreed to fund it, and it was eventually recognised as an official qualification in residential childcare, and was also recognised by the Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work in London. Both she and Mr Pat Brennan³¹ had considerable experience in social work and working with children, but neither of them had actually worked in residential childcare.

14.328 Mr Brennan, who was the Director of the Kilkenny Diploma Course in Residential Childcare, described the course and the training it offered. The course, which ran for 10 years from 1971 to 1981, came about as a result of the recommendations in the Kennedy Report. Bishop Birch offered the Department of Education a house in Kilkenny, and the Bishop sponsored and designed the course. Mr Brennan was acquainted with Bishop Birch and was offered the job of running the course. Sr Wilma was one of the lecturers on the course on a part-time basis. Students who attended the course were sent on placements for in-house training, and St Joseph's was one of the placement centres. He believed that Sr Wilma was the supervisor of the placements in St Joseph's; it was considered to be her domain and, as a result, he had very little to do with St Joseph's.

14.329 Prospective students on the course were interviewed by a panel of five, including Mr Brennan and Sr Wilma. There were normally around 50 applicants for 20 places. The requirements were: two years' experience in residential childcare, the Leaving Certificate, three references, and two essays. He said that the issues of child sexual abuse or incest were never discussed on the course and were not on the agenda. From 1973, there was a huge preoccupation with physical abuse, mainly because of the controversial Maria Colwell case in England, where a child died in 1973 as a result of failure to protect the child in a violent family situation.

14.330 The course contents included training on how to deal appropriately with bed-wetting. The course attempted to try and make the participants think for themselves and make decisions on their own, without allowing their religious training to shape all their decisions. The participants were almost entirely made up of religious personnel, and this caused some tensions. He said that some participants left the course, and he was met with some opposition about the content of the course.

14.331 Students were followed up after the course. Once a year, there was a residential weekend and they met socially. He personally called on some of the students to assess progress. The course did not require formal feedback from Resident Managers of the institutions to which the students were sent. The course ceased in 1981 because it could not get the professional recognition from the National Council for Educational Awards.

³¹ This is a pseudonym.

- 14.332 • The Pleece case and the Tade cases indicate a high level of immaturity and naivety in dealing with issues of sexual abuse, particularly on the part of Sr Astrid. Allowing these men to leave St Joseph's and continue with careers in childcare was dangerous and irresponsible. It was not enough to remove them from St Joseph's. These men posed a risk to children and, with her experience in childcare, Sr Astrid should have been aware of that.
- The inability to face up to the problem of men abusing young boys was not confined to the Sisters. Experienced Gardaí and professionals were also inadequate in their response to this issue.

The period 1978–1990

- 14.333 Sr Astrid continued as Resident Manager of St Joseph's until 1986, when she was replaced by Sr Livia.³² This was a turbulent period for the Institution, when established methods were questioned, particularly by qualified lay staff who were employed there. The documentation revealed a degree of tension between the Department of Education and the Resident Manager about keeping numbers down. The School was perceived as having too many children to care for any of them properly, although this was not a view shared by the Sisters.
- 14.334 This was a period of transition between the Department of Education and the Department of Health. Responsibility for St Joseph's was transferred to the Department of Health in January 1984.
- 14.335 On 14th October 1977, Mr Granville attended St Joseph's to give the staff a formal lecture on leadership in the group homes, and to discuss the future of St Joseph's with the Provincial and Sr Astrid. It was agreed that the aim would be to try and reduce the numbers in the homes to 60 by 1980. Mr Granville believed that the large numbers in residence were partly responsible for difficulties with the local day schools. They also discussed plans to employ a social worker for the children. Health Board social workers at that time were not geared specifically towards children.
- 14.336 From November 1977, the Department began to focus their attention on the size of St Joseph's, Kilkenny. This followed a report by Graham Granville on the future needs in residential homes. In an internal memorandum dated 16th January 1978, senior Department officials were in agreement that over 100 children was too large in Kilkenny, and around 60 maximum was a more desirable figure. The Department was perplexed by the fact that Kilkenny was so full, when the homes in other areas were faced with decreasing numbers and many were considering closing in the near future.
- 14.337 The reason for the Department of Education's dissatisfaction with the large numbers in Kilkenny is evidenced by a four-page letter dated 8th May 1978. In this letter, Thomas O'Gilin of the Department of Education invited Mr T O'Dwyer, Principal Officer in the Department of Health, to meet and discuss the question of the future development of residential homes. He set out the changes that had taken place over the years since the Kennedy Report in the area of building programmes and in the declining number of children committed through the courts and the ISPC. This had led to a situation where, in most cases, the homes' finance for current costs came from the Health Boards who had the largest number of placements, yet responsibility for capital financing still remained entirely with the Department of Education. This created the anomaly because provision of capital money entailed a planning function, but the information needed for planning for future needs had to come from the Health Boards who were placing the majority of the children. The Task Force currently studying the situation were most likely to recommend the

³² This is a pseudonym.

transfer of responsibility for residential homes to the Department of Health but, in the meantime, many urgent problems existed that required the co-operation of the two Departments.

14.338 In a report on a visit to St Joseph's, Kilkenny dated 25th April 1979, the author met with Sr Astrid and was made aware of a number of her concerns with regard to the difficulties still being experienced by short-term children fitting into the outside schools, where they underwent the double trauma of change from their own homes to residential care and out of the residential home into a strange school. She also drew his attention to the fact that, after prolonged negotiation, the social worker who had been released from the South Eastern Health Board (SEHB) to work in St Joseph's for a two-year period had now been recalled to normal duty, due to staff shortages in the SEHB. Finally, she requested grant assistance for the aftercare residence under construction.

14.339 On 23rd January 1980, the Department noted that, despite the plans to reduce numbers, the Kilkenny returns of September 1979 showed 124 children still in residence. Following an investigation into this, it was discovered that, while there had been no children committed to Kilkenny since 1977, the Health Boards were making full use of the resulting vacancies, obviously with the co-operation of the Resident Manager.

14.340 In his report dated 2nd February 1980, Mr Granville submitted what he considered were the direct relevant factors to the population figures of St Joseph's, Kilkenny. First were the changes brought about by the Kennedy Report, which meant that residential homes moved away generally from large institutional centres to group homes, and this dramatically dropped the number of residential places on a national basis. Secondly, the lack of social work support services to the any of the children in residential care in the SEHB area. Thirdly, there was a lack of preventative work being carried out under the School Attendance Act. Finally, the growth in population had not been taken into consideration by the SEHB when planning for provision of their services.

14.341 In conclusion, Mr Granville recommended that Sr Astrid should be instructed to cease all admissions until the numbers were down to 70. He also recommended that no money should be paid for the work on the aftercare hostel until numbers were reduced. He noted that Kilkenny had an excessive number of trainees and not enough trained staff.

14.342 Mr Granville carried out a General Inspection on 25th May 1980; the previous inspection was dated 27th January 1977. He inspected all the group homes and, in general, his comments were favourable. In January 1981, Mr Granville, in an addendum to his General Inspection report, noted that Summerhill had been redecorated and refurbished to an excellent standard. The five other group homes, however, still needed attention, and only two were in satisfactory condition. He noted that there were too few staff and some were untrained in the nursery, where babies were in residence for far too long. He was very concerned about the emotional damage being inadvertently caused by being handled by so many different staff, and discussed this with the Resident Manager. There were 41 staff in total in the School, two male and 39 female. There had been 32 changes of staff since 1977. His concluded his report with the following:

Conclusions:

1. The overall total number of children in residential care has not decreased over the past few years, which is a disappointing factor. Page 211 records 113 children in residence, two more than at the latest inspection. There is a marked increase in the numbers in the nursery and in the short term unit St Teresa's ... In my opinion there are far too many children in residential care in a city the size of Kilkenny.

14.343 He concluded this report by stating:

I would state that the Manager has a very serious communication problem with the staff in the group homes. There would seemingly be a lack of information at all levels being

exchanged and I would have to raise questions about this matter. I did discuss it with the Manager and I came to the conclusion that it has been a perennial problem, as far as I am concerned. It has always been extremely difficult to obtain the facts about Kilkenny, due to the defensive protective air around the centre. Nevertheless, one has to consistently maintain a working relationship with the manager and centre even at times that may be extremely difficult.

- 14.344** The following year, he inspected the School again, in February 1982, and continued to be concerned about the quality of care in the nursery and discussed this with the Resident Manager.
- 14.345** He carried out another General Inspection a year later, in February 1983, and noted that there were no longer any male staff in the group homes and felt this was a serious omission in the care teams. He was concerned about the increase in staff turnover (seven in the year) and the shortage of religious Sisters due to illness and training. Twelve of the care staff, which represented nearly 50%, were on childcare courses, which presented a serious management issue and were being replaced by substitute staff on a part-time basis, which he was not happy or satisfied with, as the children had no continuity with staff.
- 14.346** Summerhill was now known as Sancta Maria, and provided additional short-term accommodation. The nursery had been closed, which was a major achievement. The quality of care within the nursery had not been satisfactory, and the Manager was aware of his views backed by evidence. He was still concerned about the high number of children in care in Kilkenny, too high for the city to absorb in socialisation and academic terms.
- 14.347** St Joseph's asked the Department in late 1983 to sanction a remedial teacher to be attached to the School. The difficulty for the School centred around the fact that local schools were unwilling to cater for children on 'short term' stay in St Joseph's. On 16th February, officials from the Department of Education, Department of Health and South Eastern Health Board met to discuss the special educational needs of short-term referrals, where it was agreed that the Department of Education would consider approving the services of an extra teacher, on a trial basis, to cater for the needs of these children.
- 14.348** Sr Ronja,³³ who was in charge of Avondale was the subject of complaints by two childcare workers, in 1986 and 1990 respectively.
- 14.349** A woman in Avondale from 1985 to 1986 made complaints including institutionalisation of the home, lack of consideration given to professional opinions of staff, authoritarian-style leadership, failure to cater for the emotional needs of the children and corporal punishment.
- 14.350** The complaint was investigated by a Health Board official, but he dismissed it. Sr Ronja said she had no recollection of this investigation, and did not recall speaking with him, despite being shown contemporary documentation of such meetings.
- 14.351** In April 1990, childcare practices in Avondale came under scrutiny once again. Another childcare worker met with Sr Alicia³⁴ and the Health Board official and outlined the difficulties in Avondale in regard to the manner in which the childcare services were being conducted there under Sr Ronja.
- 14.352** She expressed grave concern about the following areas:
1. Corporal Punishment – severe in some cases

³³ This is a pseudonym.

³⁴ This is a pseudonym.

2. Control of food – being stored in room of House Parent and not available to childcare staff
3. Provision of mundane food at certain times and better food being produced when house parent appeared
4. Refusal of houseparent to communicate with staff
5. Undermining of decision made by childcare staff
6. Problems with staff roster and rostering of house parent

14.353 She informed the meeting that another qualified care worker in the house was threatening to resign unless matters improved quickly.

14.354 On 30th April 1990, in a letter addressed to Sr Alicia, Programme Manager of the South Eastern Health Board, Sr Ronja, House Parent of Avondale, tendered her resignation, having been assigned by her Superior General to a missionary post overseas.

14.355 The childcare worker gave evidence of her experience in St Joseph's. She completed the Kilkenny childcare course in 1974/75 and obtained a contract in Avondale in St Joseph's for a six-month period from January to July 1990. There were 11 children in the unit, and Sr Ronja was in charge. At the start of her assignment, Sr Alicia warned her that the person she would be working with was 'quite difficult'. What transpired was that she found the systems in place in Avondale institutional and sterile, and the staff were mainly involved in cleaning, sewing and cooking, with little time devoted to the emotional needs of the children. Very little affection was demonstrated, and there was one particular child singled out for favouritism. The children told her they were beaten quite severely, and she had no reason to doubt what they were saying to her. Food was of reasonable quality but was rationed, and there was no flexibility around the portions the children were allowed. She found all this extraordinary in the 1990s.

14.356 She met with Sr Alicia and a Health Board official about her concerns in April 1990. She complained about Sr Ronja's management of the children in the house. There was no consultation over key decisions, and Sr Ronja was an autocratic manager. She felt that Sr Ronja resented her and perceived her as upsetting the apple cart. Children were not allowed to show any signs of independence. For example, she allowed the older children to walk to mass by themselves one day, and Sr Ronja took grave exception to this.

14.357 Sr Ronja also gave evidence. She joined the Sisters of Charity in the mid-1970s. She started in St Joseph's in 1977 and remained there until 1990. She was a qualified childcare worker. Sr Ronja worked in St Joseph's initially and, in 1981, she became House Parent in a group home known as Avondale, which catered for 15 children aged 2 to 15 years. She reported directly to Sr Astrid and, in the beginning, she only had one live-in staff member, Barbara Brady,³⁵ who was a tireless worker.

14.358 Sr Ronja tried to ensure that the children in her group home were properly fed, clothed and attended school. She enforced discipline by occasionally slapping the younger children on the backside with an open hand and sending them to their rooms. With the older children, she would ground them from a disco or swimming.

14.359 Sr Astrid gave evidence that she witnessed Sr Ronja physically punishing a pupil. Sr Ronja did not remember this occasion, although she did remember having to slap the boy once for not attending school and forging notes of excuse. Sr Astrid said in her Garda statement that she recalled that some of the children complained to her that Sr Ronja was cruel to them. She said

³⁵ This is a pseudonym.

that, one day, Sr Ronja had a small boy in the convent parlour. She recalled hearing the boy screaming because Sr Ronja was beating him. She said that Sr Ronja was reprimanded for that.

General conclusions

- 14.360**
- 1. The Sisters of Charity were progressive in their approach and unique among Congregations in sending their members to the UK to undergo courses in childcare and, as a result, they split up the Institution into separate units, which worked much better than the large unitary institutions.**
 - 2. Notwithstanding the favourable evidence about this Institution, children were severely physically punished and treated unsympathetically by some of the care staff, which continued into later years. Even when complaints were made, no action was taken by management to protect the children.**
 - 3. Differential treatment between the units is a major criticism of the Institution. The quality of care depended on which unit the child was placed in. The blue unit was run by Sr Astrid, the Resident Manager, and the girls in it received the most favourable treatment, according to the evidence. This Sister was very kind and there was little or no corporal punishment, and the girls in her group considered themselves, and were considered, to be the lucky ones.**
 - 4. No lessons were learned from the Jacobs case at the time, and no proper system of record keeping or monitoring was introduced. In its Submissions, the Congregation did not address the serious implications of this case. The apology referred only to the two convicted abusers and, even then, no Congregational responsibility was acknowledged.**
 - 5. Sr Astrid eventually removed Mr Pleece and, later, Mr Tade after complaints were made to her about them. However, she did not face up to what had happened to the children. She failed in her duty to provide accurate information to other bodies and thereby exposed other children to the risk of abuse.**

Appendix 1

1876–1882

- Ten acres purchased for farm.
- Foundation stone for new chapel and convent.
- Main sewer installed from school to river. Grant of £100 from Corporation paid for installation.
- Convent cells were demolished to provide dormitories for the children and a new Lavatory.
- Water supply previously provided in barrels now replaced by flow conveyed by machinery from the River Nore.

1888–1894

- Wall to enclose the farmyard.
- New stable, coach house and hennerly built.
- Entrance gate erected.
- New wing erected. Consisted of School room 62 feet long and 27 feet wide, with 59 bedded dormitory over it. Mr Stephen Lalor builder. Mr Byrne architect.

1894–1900

- Veranda erected: glass-roofed passage leading from the playhall to the Schoolroom and other parts of the Institution.
- New Entrance gate.
- Rebuilding of Institution stairs and other improvements following a fire.

1900–1905

- A new Technical room erected with a small Dormitory for the little ones above. Built by Mr Cleere and completed by 8th May 1903.
- Review Fields purchased under the new Land Act by Mr Buggy solicitor.

1905–1915

- 1907: House and premises of Mr Pembroke of Patrick Street rented for us by Mr Lanigan, Solicitor. Rent was £24 per annum with 82 year lease.
- Boundary wall built; cattle houses and stables built on farmyard side and an entrance in the farmyard made with a new gate for cattle and fodder. Cost £204.10.0 Completed in May 1908. Architect Mr Burden of Kilkenny. Fee £8.
- Electric light brought to Convent and Institution by Ampere Electrical, County Dublin. Completed in January 1910.
- 1914: New bathroom with two baths, foot baths, hair-washing baths, dispensary apparatus with one bath and three up to date w.c.'s, copper boiler and large cylinder installed. Cost £282.12.1. Mr Cleere, builder. Mr Young, plumber.
- New copper piping installed by Mr Young. Cost of £407.10.0.
- 1915: Repairs to gable end of Steward's House, boundary wall and cow house.
- Cottage completely renovated. Cost £217. Builder Mr Cleere. Sanitary arrangements by Mr Young £33.

1925

- Electric Battery renewed: £243. It supplies Institution, Convent and Laundry.

1926

- New system of conduit pipes in the children dressing room installed. Cost £142.10.0
- Field purchased of 8 acres at £450.

1927

- Heating apparatus installed in new play hall which heats St Mary's and St Michael's dormitories, as well as the Dispensary, Nursery, Infirmary and schoolroom.

1928

- Completed the Central heating of Institution- including children's refectory, workroom, Linen room. Teachers room, lower corridor and upstairs, all dormitories, corridor etc. – also convent.

1930

- New hostel for the girls to replace the cottage. Cost: £377.

1932

- Store room in Institution retiled, new presses fitted and a Carron Range erected to replace the old one.
- Back playground was cemented.

1933

- Veranda passage rebuilt and enlarged.
- Part of roof re-slatted and fitted with snow-boards.
- Part of wall cemented.

1934

- Battery for electric light renewed. New house constructed for same.

1935–1941

- Two fields purchased known locally as Morrissey's fields for a playing field for the children adjoining the school yard and another large field adjacent to the convent grounds.
- A modern playground built and equipped.
- 1936: New Girl-Guide hall built and opened on 2nd February.

1938

- New water tank erected for the Institution. Holds 4,000 gallons of water Cost £131.10.0

1942

- Owing to the shortage of Fuel Oil the ESB installed their Plant in the Institution, Convent and laundry, re-wiring the whole premises.
- Gas Stoves were erected in Hostel and Institution – as it was impossible to get fuel.

- Kooks Joy Range was also installed in Institution Kitchen, at a cost of £50 for Cooking purposes and heating water etc.

1944

- A concrete stairs was erected at the cost of £200, making an external exit from two Dormitories at the back of the Institution, from the back playground in case of fire.

1946

- Hostel was repainted, the dining room greatly improved by being painted cream and light oak. The large refectory table was replaced by for small tables placed in each corner of the room with a serving table in the centre, a new set of chairs completed the furnishing. In 1947 a pretty green lino and cretonne curtains added greatly to the appearance of the room.

1947–1953

- Playground equipped with swings for Seniors and Juniors, also
- in 1948 the playground was equipped with the very latest swings for both seniors and juniors. A 'Great Stride' was also erected and see-saws. A fine sand pit complete with cement table.
- A nursery was built for the babies costing approx. £3,000
- A new Lavatory Block was built costing about £2,000
- The Kitchen was equipped with all Electric Fittings.
- The Institution was re-modelled to make it suitable for the new 'Family Group' system
- Between 1947 and 1949 much repair work undertaken. Cost approx. £900.
- The walls around the playground had to be renewed.
- The Institution Kitchen was turned into an all-electric one – Potato Peeler – Baking and Roasting Ovens – Stewpan etc. The floor was redone in green and cream Terrazzo costing approx. £1,000.
- A much needed Sanitary Block was built for night use. It contained five lavatories and a sluice. It also was done in Terrazzo.
- Two of the Junior dormitories were also fitted with a lavatory each and a footbath. The approx. cost was £2,000.

1950

- New Nursery completed. It contains a sunny day Nursery and Refectory.

1953

- The night Nursery, Baths and Toilets were added, thus completing the babies suite of apartments.

1953–1959

- The paths round the Convent were treated by Roadstone, the Children's playground had a hard court laid, and it is fenced round it can be used to advantage as a Baby's Pen when not in use for the other children, it is marked and equipped for Tennis and Basket Ball.
- A new fowl house was built at the cost of £550 approx.

1959–1965

- Walls between old kitchen and little pantry knocked down. Room painted as play-room for children from 4 years upwards.
- 1961: In St Bernadette's house two dormitories were painted. lino laid on stairs.
- Small room fitted out for past pupils who return for visit of a few nights of weeks.
- 1962: In the children's houses new colourful tiles went into their refectories and corridors
- Up to this time, our heating was all by coal and coke, but in October the Convent and school went on to oil heating.
- The school was painted in bright, lovely colours and two new toilets were added to the baby room.
- Babies playroom was painted in bright grey colours and old benches were converted into little seats with pretty, flowered, cretonne covers, Their bathroom was done up.
- A dormitory in each house was painted.
- 1965: Fire precautions installed after inspection by Mr Madden. Partition installed on the top of the stairs in the Institution. The panels were to be of fire glass. All the panels in the existing doors between the groups had to have panels of fire glass also.
- Painting of the refectories in St Bernadette's and St Theresa's Houses and the sitting room in St Joseph's house.
- A new up to date cow byre constructed. Grant to be provided by the Department.

1965–1984

- 1969: the first group of children moved out of St Joseph's into St Kieran's lodge.
- The school (Summerhill) was renovated and turned into a group home and the three houses in the main building were also renovated and turned into self-contained homes with gas cookers and fridges in the kitchenettes.
- 19th March 1970: a group of twelve children moved to Beechpark, which is a residential area about one mile from St Joseph's.
- In March 1970 a grant of £15,000 was received from the Department towards the cost of the following works totalling £26,600:

— Repairs to roof and floors of section of main building	£7,000
— Levelling of field	£1,500
— Completion of work on group home in main building	£6,000
— Adaptation of old school	£4,500
— Purchase of two houses	£7,600
— Work on two group homes within main building	£13,000
— New laundry for residential home	£4,000
— Renovation of two buildings (Maryville and No 45 Waterford Road)	£4,000
— Renovation of Chapel	£20,000
— Central Heating	£17,300

- A grant of £9,000 was paid at the close of the financial year 1971/72 towards the cost of building and equipping a sports hall estimated to cost up to £20,000. Before the work could be commenced, however, *'it came to the nuns' notice that plans were going ahead for the erection on a nearby site of a parish community hall. The project at the residential home had therefore to be left in abeyance'*. The grant was then used for other repairs in the house.

- Thereafter there is no record of the improvements, additions, renovation in each House.
- In March 1976, 'Avondale', a bungalow on the Waterford Rd., was purchased by the Sisters of Charity at a cost of £29,000.
- In 1976 St Joseph's purchased a plot in the back garden of the Convent in Tramore. A mobile home for the children and caravan for the Sisters was purchased. The mobile home proved too small and confined for the numbers so a house was erected in 1978 to accommodate a maximum of forty children for holidays.
- 1984 grant of £5,000 from SEHB towards repairs to floor in Slievenamon After-Care Hostel, Stanhope Street.