



Comments of Religious Sisters of Charity on the
Report entitled:

**“An Assessment of the Health Status of Children Detained
at Irish Industrial Schools 1940 to 1990”**

Dr. A. Staines
Mr. A. Boilson
Dr. F. Craven
Ms. E. Wise

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Report: **Title Page: “An Assessment of the Health Status of Children Detained at Irish Industrial Schools 1940 to 1990”**

Comment: The content of the Report does not appear to reflect the period 1940 – 1990 in all Cases as the title page would seem to indicate, e.g.

- Some of the conclusions only cover the period up to 1984 when the Department of Health took over responsibility for industrial schools e.g. Page 80 of 139 Lines 14-15 ‘From 1940 up until 1983 when the last available data was recorded in the Dept. of Education reports (n=2,581) children were detained at the institution ...’ and the table in **APPENDIX 3 – Archive Statistics**, Appendix 1.
- The statistics given to the Commission’s researchers by the Sisters of Charity in relation to St. Joseph’s Kilkenny and Lakelands covered the period up to the handover of the schools in 1999 and 2000 respectively.

Page 2 of 56 [under the title Summary]

Line 42

Report: *"However it was not possible to gather much information about the age distribution of these children."*

Comment: It was possible for the Commission's researchers to gather adequate information about the age distribution of the children in our Schools as the age and date of entry of the children are available. Furthermore, all records were made available by the Sisters of Charity on all occasions. Where any detailed clarification or breakdown of information was requested it was provided.

Line 44

Report: *"Using the limited available data, and interpreting it cautiously, the children admitted were both short, and (approximately) proportionately light."*

Comment: It is entirely unclear what is meant by the phrase 'interpreting it cautiously'. If the interpretation is based on an inadequate premise then it is as likely to be false as to be true. The data therefore cannot and should not be relied on to draw any conclusion.

Page 7 of 56 Introduction [The Industrial School System]

Report: *".... These institutions helped to sustain each other as girls from the reformatory and industrial schools often ended up working their entire lives in Magdalen laundries; many of the children of unmarried mothers, born in the county homes, and mother and baby homes, were placed in industrial schools (Raftery, et al, 1999)"*

Comment: According to the records of the Sisters of Charity this is completely inaccurate.

Lines 1 - 17

Report:

Comment: Lines 1-17 missing

Lines 18 and 19

Report: *"Although Dr McCabe continued her role as Medical Inspector of the schools until the early 1960's, she appears to have played a more subdued role from 1945 onwards."*

Comment: The records from Sisters of Charity schools do not demonstrate a diminished role for Dr. Anna McCabe after 1945. On the contrary, the evidence from the medical reports on our schools, made available to us in the Department of Education Discovery, indicate that the opposite was the case. Her continued, detailed and comprehensive involvement is borne out, for example, by the manner in which she investigated abuse allegations against a worker in St. Joseph's, Kilkenny in 1954 – 1955.

Line 49 - 51

Report: *"... meat was rarely consumed, their protein intake was mainly derived from vegetables rather than animal sources. Their calcium intake was also inadequate, for example the consumption of cheese was almost non-existent across all schools investigated. (Archer, 1962)"*

Comment: The above conclusion could not be ascribed to St. Joseph's Kilkenny or St. Patrick's Kilkenny. There is no reference whatever in Dr. McCabe's medical reports on our Schools which would indicate that meat was rarely consumed. In addition, the memory – and evidence – from past residents would generally indicate that meat was provided on a regular basis (though some children might not have liked it).

We are not aware of any evidence or primary source indicating a generally inadequate calcium intake by the children in the Sisters of Charity schools. There is only one indirect reference to inadequate calcium throughout the entire history of the schools. The situation was addressed immediately.

In regard to St. Joseph's, in her Statement of Proposed Evidence (page 66), Sr. Úna O'Neill stated:

"There is no evidence to suggest that the children in St. Joseph's ever suffered from an inadequate or unsuitable diet. On the contrary, a number of the Medical Reports between 1946 and 1950 state that the diet was good and the children were well fed. There was only one exception to the above. In an Inspection by Dr. A. McCabe on 4th July, 1944 she recommended that milk be increased to one pint per child per day and that butter be increased to 6 ozs per child per week. This is followed by a letter from the Inspector on the 5th August. A reply from St. Joseph's, on the 7th of September, stated that each child was getting more than the required 1 pt of milk daily and more than 6 oz. butter per head per week. Subsequent Inspections make no further reference to the above or carry any criticism or query in regard to the diet of the children. On the contrary it appears that the Inspectors were satisfied. For example the Report on the Inspection of the 9th – 10th June 1954 the Inspector noted that the food and diet were very good and that the meals were well balanced and attractive." [DEJK059-020/]

In her direct evidence and in response to questioning before the Commission on 1st November 2005, (page 90:4-22) Sr. Úna O'Neill responded to questions as follows:

- Q. In dealing with food, you make the point that there no evidence on the documentation to suggest that the children in St. Joseph's ever suffered from an inadequate or unsuitable diet. The exception, of course, to that being the reference which we spoke of earlier, to Dr. McCabe's direction in July 1944?*
- A. That's right.*
- Q. That each child get its full milk and butter quota?*
- A. Per day.*
- Q. I think that is something on which Dr. McCabe followed up and the Resident Manager assured her that they were being provided?*
- A. That's right, yes. Other than that the reports are very positive about the food. The farm was there up until the late 1950's, it would appear, so that they were able to have their own cows and supply of eggs for the children in the convent. The past residents would say that the food was fine, there is no complaints about that.*

It is reasonable to assume that if such a deficiency had existed at other times it would be documented in the same way.

In regard to St. Patrick's, in her Statement of Proposed Evidence (page 11), Sr. Úna O'Neill stated:

"ii) Food:

Because of the farm, the Institution was generally self-sufficient in terms of fruit, vegetables and dairy products. The menu did not vary very much from day to day but generally appears to have been nourishing and sufficient.

This conclusion is supported by the reports of the Department which refer, for example, refer to the menu in 1954 as "good", "very good", "satisfactory", "excellent", "very good, well-balanced, varied diet" One exception is a recommendation in a letter dated 19th July 1944, arising from the Inspector's Report, that the boys daily milk consumption and butter rations needed to be increased because certain children were underweight. In the report to which this letter refers the following comments are also included under the heading: General Observations and Suggestions: "Well conducted school – children well cared – very clean".

In her direct evidence and in response to questioning before the Commission on 7th February 2005, (page 51:25 and 53:2) Sr. Úna O'Neill responded to questions as follows:

"Q. Yes. On the issue of food. I think you have already told the Commission that the school was quite self-sufficient in terms of farm produce.

A. That's right.

Q. And you set out in your statement examples of the food which was available and that is after referring to comments from the Department inspectors indicating that the food was satisfactory. Could you just take us through a typical day and what would have been on the menu in case an issue should arise about the quality of the food. What would have been the breakfast menu generally in the 50's say?

A. In the 50's as far as we could get the information for breakfast they would have had porridge and cocoa and fried bread. The bread would have been fried in dipping for their breakfast. Later on they had cornflakes on Sunday, they would have been considered a treat I suppose in the later years. For dinner they had soup and mince or stew, potatoes and vegetables. Sometimes they got rice, semolina or bread pudding for desert and on very special days they'd have got jelly and custard.

Q. Dinner would have been in the middle of the day I suppose.

A. Dinner would have been in the middle of the day.

Q. As we all remember it in those days.

A. Indeed, yes.

Q. Then after school?

A. After school they were given cocoa and bread and then at teatime they were given sausages or eggs boiled or scrambled, bread and homemade jam or dripping. We know that Crotty's of Kilkenny gave confectionary and bracks occasionally and a Madeira cake was made in the institution kitchen and homemade ice cream was made during the summer and given occasionally to the children."

Line 9 - 15

Report: *"It is evident from the findings reported that the industrial school system was mismanaged by the Dept. of Education and the religious orders whose responsibility was to look after the children under their care. Dr. Anne McCabe's investigations highlighted the children were undernourished, received inadequate medical attention, and in most schools not even provided an adequate maintenance diet to keep them from losing weight, despite the fact the schools were paid an adequate per capita grant from the Dept. of Education. "*

Comment: A. The first paragraph under **Conclusions** is confused in its presentation and raises a number of questions that cast doubt on the validity of the conclusions. For example:

- (i) What 'findings reported' are being relied on? The sources are not identified.
- (ii) The reference to Dr. Anne McCabe's investigations cannot be related to any report prepared by Dr. Anna McCabe of the Department of Education that we have seen.
- (iii) If the reference to Dr. Anne McCabe is intended to be a reference to the published work of Dr. Augusta McCabe, the Commission should be aware that her work related exclusively to Boarded out children and not to children in Industrial Schools.

B. Our medical reports do not indicate that the children in our schools were 'undernourished' or that they 'received inadequate medical attention' or that they 'had an inadequate diet'.
See Statement of Proposed Evidence of Sr. Úna O'Neill: St. Joseph's Kilkenny, pp. 66-73 and St. Patrick's p 11 quoted above.

In all of the years under examination there was one negative comment re diet in St. Joseph's: See p. 66 re Report of Inspection, 4th July, 1944 Statement of Proposed Evidence of Sr. Úna O'Neill: and St. Patrick's Kilkenny p.11, Recommendation in letter dated 19th July, 1944. Both comments are in relation to milk and butter rations, see comment on page 9 of Staines Report above.

C. In regard to health of children in St. Joseph's the Inspection Reports consistently record the health of the children as good or excellent. In her Statement of Proposed Evidence, (page 71) Sr. Úna O'Neill stated:

"General Health of Children

The Medical Inspector Reports are consistently positive in relation to the general medical and dental care of the children. A number of the Reports state

that '*. . .children are well cared for medically*' e.g. 7th December 1943, 15th February 1945; 16th May 1946.

The health of the children appears to have been consistently good apart from the usual childhood illnesses such as chickenpox, measles, jaundice etc. For example the Inspection Report of the 15th June 1948 recorded: '. . . the health of the school is excellent..' ; 'all of the children are in good health and are being well cared for'. The general health of the children continued to be judged to be very good or, indeed, excellent. The same type of statement is present in the Reports of the 1960's and 1970's: e.g. '. . . general health of the children examined is excellent. There was a remarkably low incidence of Dental Cavities . . and their nutrition was also excellent'. (28th/29th September 1964) [DEJK062-009] ; Report on period 31st March/30th September 1978 stated that: '. . . these children are in good health and are being well cared for'. [DEJK062-020]

In her direct evidence and in response to questioning before the Commission on 1st November 2005, (page 91:14-27) Sr. Úna O'Neill responded to questions as follows:

"Q. Yes. You deal with the medical care which was afforded to the children. First of all, you deal with the medical inspector's reports, which you describe as being consistently positive?

A. That's correct, yes. I deal with that under a number of headings. The general health of the children: They are well cared for medically, that's the general comment right down through and it is linked with their nutrition being excellent and the fact that they were in good health and being well cared for.

That is right through from 1943 right up to the reports in the 70's. In all Dr. McCabe's inspections she notes that the children's health was good, very good or excellent."

The General Inspections are consistent with the above. There was one occasion where there was criticism in regard to a delay in relation to blood tests (DEJK061-016)

In regard to health of children in St. Patrick's the Inspection Reports all reports are favourable and the care is frequently referred to as very good or excellent. In her Statement of Proposed Evidence (page 13) Sr. Úna O'Neill stated:

"iv) Medical Care

The Discovery documentation furnished by the Department of Education and Science provides detailed reports regarding the quality of medical and dental care at St. Patrick's Kilkenny.

All of these reports are favourable and ... the care is referred to as very good

or excellent. (see for example, Medical Inspectors Report 11th October, 1951; Department Inspection 27th November 1958 etc.).”

In her direct evidence and in response to questioning before the Commission on 7th February 2005, (page 56:29 and 57:1-8) Sr. Úna O’Neill responded to questions as follows:

“Q. Sister, I would now like to ask you about the regime of medical care which existed.

A. Yes, from the discovery documentation that was furnished by the Department of Education and Science we get detailed reports regarding the quality of the medical and dental care at St. Patrick's, Kilkenny. All of the reports that we had access to through that discovery are favorable and the care is frequently referred to as very good or excellent.”

Lines 38 and 39

Report: “... *the Sisters of Charity (N=4) based in Harold's Cross ...*”

Correction: ... the Sisters of Charity (N=5) based in Donnybrook

Lines 17 – 21 (page 15)

Report: *“In total (n=10,213) children were detained across all their schools . . .”*

Correction: In total (n=4,461) children were detained across all their schools . . .

Comment: Having carefully reviewed the population data in relation to our Schools, we believe that the section of the Report headed ‘Population Data’ is seriously flawed.

- (i) In lines 19-20 the source of the number 10,213 is not apparent and cannot be reconciled with our records.
- (ii) It is not clear whether the numbers cited are intended to include all children or only those children committed by the Courts. For example, in paragraph commencing at line 17 the total number of children detained in the schools is given as (10,213). However, In Table 1 (on pages 15 – 16: entitled **Occupancy of Irish Industrial Schools 1940 to 1970**) the same number is given for court committed children only.
- (iii) There are two different dates used in the Report, neither of which reflects the data that was provided to the Commission’s research team.
 - The title of the Staines Report refers to the period 1940 – 1990.
 - Table 1 (on pages 15 -16) is described as: Occupancy of Irish Industrial Schools 1940 to 1970.
 - The figures provided by the Sisters of Charity refer to the varied periods of residency up to the time of closure or hand-over in each case.

In any event the numbers cannot be reconciled with our records.

[The term ‘detained’ is used throughout the report to refer to children resident in our schools. It is submitted that the word ‘detained’ is not an appropriate word to be used when referring to children resident in the Schools run by the Sisters of Charity.)

Page 17 of 56 [under the heading Sisters of Mercy]

Line 7

Report: *"... and the Sisters of Charity who ran girls schools ..."*

Correction: ... and the Sisters of Charity who ran schools for girls and boys ...

Line 17

Report: *"for Lakelands"*

Correction: References to Lakelands should be included under Sisters of Charity page 19 of 56

Line 31

Report: *"Lakelands"*

Correction: References to Lakelands should be included under Sisters of Charity page 19 of 56

Page 19 of 56 [under the heading Sisters of Charity]

Line 26 - 30

Report: *"There were only four schools analysed which were under the order of the Sisters of Charity namely: Ballaghaderreen, Benada Abbey, St. Joseph's Kilkenny and St. Patrick's Kilkenny."*

Correction: There were only five schools analysed which were under the order of the Sisters of Charity namely: Ballaghaderreen, Benada Abbey, Lakelands, St. Joseph's Kilkenny and St. Patrick's Kilkenny.

Page 24 of 56 **[under the heading Sisters of Mercy]**

Line 12:

Report: ". . *Dundalk, Goldenbridge, Lakelands, Loughrea.* ."

Correction: Lakelands was one of our Schools, not Sisters of Mercy.

Page 25 of 56 **[under the heading Sisters of Charity]**

Line 5 - 15

Report: "*Lakelands omitted*"

Correction: Insert Lakelands.

Line 16

Report: *"In summary insufficient medical information was obtained from the schools. . . ."*

Comment: The above statement is open to the interpretation that more medical information could or should have been provided to the authors of the Report. In answer the Sisters of Charity state as follows:

- (i) All extant records were furnished and made available to the Commission's research team.
- (ii) A considerable amount of anecdotal evidence was provided in the evidence of Sr. Úna O'Neill and former residents.
- (iii) The fullest assistance was provided by the Sisters of Charity to the Commission throughout its investigation.

In regard to the period directly prior to the 1990's there was a wealth of information in regard to health, attendance at doctors etc. There does not appear to be any reference to this source material in the Report.

Lines 20-23: This sentence does not appear to make any logical sense.

Pages 33; 35/36/37

Comment: We are unable to comment on this material because of the manner in which it is presented.

Page 34 of 56 [under the title Results on page 32]

Lines 11 and 12

Report: *"The Comparison group, American children measured between about 1965 and 1975, are considerably taller and somewhat heavier than this group."*

Comment: While the Sisters of Charity are not aware of what statistical data is available in this regard, we believe a more useful comparison group would be Irish children not resident in Industrial Schools during the relevant period. See also the conclusion drawn on page 55 of 56 in this regard.

Page 39 of 56

Comment: There are two pages numbered 39 (one before page 40 and one after page 40) with different information on each.

Page 41 of 56

Comment: This page holds the same information as page 42 of 58. Page 42 of 58 is followed by page 42 of 56.

