

## Chapter 14:

### Module 7 – Rathgael Training School

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## The History and Role of Rathgael

- 1 Rathgael was registered as a training school for boys in 1968, but its role was rooted in the earlier history of the reformatory and industrial school system in Northern Ireland, and in particular Balmoral Industrial School, Malone Reformatory and Whiteabbey, a school for girls.<sup>1</sup> It will be noted that account has been taken of changes in social policy and childcare methods in considering the development of Rathgael and in making any criticisms of practice.
- 2 A former warship, the ‘Gibraltar’, was used as a training ship from 1872, and it was registered as an industrial school on 15 June 1877 to provide nautical training for over 300 boys so that they had the skills to obtain work at sea. It was moored in Belfast Lough, and when life on board proved unsuited to the care of the younger boys, an additional school was sited at Fox Lodge from 10 January 1884 on Ravenhill Road, Belfast. This school expanded to meet demand, and by 1897 it held 133 boys. To meet the increased requirement for places a site was acquired at Balmoral in September 1897, which opened in November 1897 to replace Fox Lodge. On 13 March 1899 the ship, by now renamed the ‘Grampian’, was closed and the remaining boys were brought ashore and placed at Balmoral, where a large new wing was added and junior and senior sections were established. The nautical traditions were maintained and it was not until 1934 that naval uniform was abandoned. The school at Balmoral was registered for 350 boys, but actually held as many as 442 boys.<sup>2</sup>
- 3 Following the implementation of the Children Act 1908, industrial schools were used less and the occupancy of Balmoral dropped. It was taken over by Belfast City Corporation on 30 June 1920, shortly before the partition of Ireland. When Northern Ireland was established in 1922, industrial schools such as Balmoral were re-registered. In 1939, with the outbreak of the Second World War, the school’s premises were required as a military hospital, and so Balmoral moved to Shamrock Lodge on the Ballysillan Road, Belfast.<sup>3</sup>
- 4 Malone was originally established as a reformatory for boys in 1860 managed by a voluntary board. It was modelled on Redhill School, which

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1 For a fuller history of Rathgael and its predecessor institutions, see RGL 22202-22246. We are indebted to Campbell Whyte and Lindsay Conway for much of the information describing the running of Rathgael.

2 RGL 22208, 22212, 22195-22196.

3 RGL 22196.

was opened in the eighteenth century, a predecessor of reformatory schools, run by the Royal Philanthropic Society in Surrey.<sup>4</sup> In its earlier years Malone was busy, but occupancy was variable at times. For example, around 1885 magistrates became more reluctant to commit boys for reformatory training, as it still entailed an initial period in prison, and around 1920 there was increased use of probation. After much negotiation, Malone was brought under the control of the Ministry of Home Affairs in 1926 under the Malone Training School Act (Northern Ireland) and in 1927 a borstal wing was opened. This meant that in the period from 1927 to 1968 a large proportion of the staff was drawn from the Prison Service.<sup>5</sup>

- 5 In 1945 Whiteabbey Reformatory School was certified for girls and a year later it was also certified as an industrial school.
- 6 In 1950 the Children and Young Persons Act (Northern Ireland) was passed, amalgamating the industrial schools and reformatories as training schools. Therefore Malone, Balmoral and Whiteabbey were registered as training schools. Under section 72 of that Act, a court or the Ministry was obliged, in determining the training school to which a young person should be sent, to select, where practicable, a school for the religious persuasion to which the girl or boy belonged. As Roman Catholic boys attended St Patrick's and girls were placed in St Joseph's, the other three training schools in effect served Protestant children. The Malone and Whiteabbey Training School Act (Northern Ireland) merged Malone and Balmoral training schools in 1956, and the Malone and Whiteabbey Training School Management Board was set up. Temporary accommodation arrangements had to be made pending the opening of the new Rathgael buildings, and there followed an unsettled period when the Malone and Balmoral schools were combined.
- 7 In July 1956 the borstal wing at Malone was moved to Millisle, and in 1968 the training school was closed.<sup>6</sup> The boys and staff were moved from the combined Malone and Balmoral schools to purpose-built premises at Rathgael. This move marked the beginning of a new era. It was intended to take a more up-to-date progressive approach in the provision of care and education for the boys. There was a programme of staff secondment on qualifying courses in residential childcare in England, which introduced

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4 RGL 22220.

5 RGL 22196, 22221-22223.

6 RGL 22197.

the students to different ideas. Housemasters and housemothers were appointed, a wider range of activities was offered, comprehensive assessments were undertaken on admission, and psychiatric support was made available.<sup>7</sup>

- 8 Lindsay Conway, who was first employed at Rathgael as an assistant housemaster in 1972 said that he and a teacher, Campbell Whyte, considered themselves:

“to be very much part of a new generation of staff being recruited into Rathgael aimed at developing new approaches and creating a different culture within the Training School sector.”<sup>8</sup>

- 9 Despite the range of new ideas which were introduced, some of the traditional working methods and staff attitudes from the Malone and Balmoral era inevitably lingered for some time. Lindsay Conway wrote:

“A small percentage of staff felt that their only approach, especially with the senior boys, was to be ‘macho’; this resulted in a more regimented approach, with an emphasis on physical activity and a highly competitive regime. Over time this was replaced by a more relational approach to working with young people, and the introduction of marks and the setting of short-term goals.”<sup>9</sup>

The change described by Lindsay Conway can be seen in the nature of the evidence provided by the witnesses.

- 10 Prior to the opening of Lisnevin in 1973, Rathgael was the only training school in Northern Ireland for Protestant boys, although a small number of young people were moved to community homes with education in England when secure accommodation or specialist forms of therapeutic care were required.<sup>10</sup> It was therefore expected to provide for boys with a wide variety of problems and cope with difficult behaviour. Campbell Whyte stated that Rathgael, despite being an open institution:

“accommodated the most difficult, damaged, disturbed and, in some cases, delinquent children”

from the Protestant communities of Northern Ireland.<sup>11</sup>

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7 RGL 22231-22232.

8 RGL 5091.

9 RGL 5094.

10 RGL 5093.

11 RGL 1715.

- 11 From 1958 to 1985 Rathgael was an all-boys school, but in 1985 Whiteabbey was closed and the girls were transferred to Rathgael, which became mixed. The amalgamation also offered the opportunity for a change to be made from the division between a senior and a junior school to the provision of a justice side for offenders and a care side for non-offenders. This development was therefore the final stage in a process of amalgamation, which saw the functions of Malone, Balmoral and Whiteabbey combined on the one site at Rathgael. The numbers of children and young people requiring this type of residential care had clearly diminished considerably over the previous fifty years.<sup>12</sup>
- 12 The closure of Whiteabbey and the move to Rathgael had been planned to take effect by 3 June 1985, and measures were taken to reduce the number of girls for transfer. Indeed there were those who argued that all the girls who had been at Whiteabbey should have been discharged from there, so that Rathgael would admit only girls who had had no experience of Whiteabbey. However, the process of transfer was accelerated by a fire in March 1985 which severely damaged Whiteabbey.<sup>13</sup> Consequently, the amalgamation of the two schools was not trouble-free.
- 13 The ten girls who moved over did not want to be in Rathgael and when they were placed together in one unit there were disruptive and challenging behavioural problems. The girls were then split up between the other units, and they settled down.<sup>14</sup> The Whiteabbey staff also had some difficulty in coming to terms with a different way of doing things, but the two teams were integrated over time.<sup>15</sup> Rathgael continued as a mixed training school for thirteen years from 1985 to 1998, after the end of the Inquiry's remit.
- 14 In 1995 the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 was passed, enacting some of the Black Report's recommendations, and replacing training schools with juvenile justice centres. In 1998, Rathgael was closed but it continued to serve children and young people as a juvenile justice centre under the name of 'Lakeside', managed by the North Down and Ards Trust<sup>16</sup> It is estimated that between eight and nine thousand children and young people passed through Rathgael between 1968 and 1998.<sup>17</sup>

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12 RGL 21685.

13 RGL 5099.

14 RGL 1722.

15 RGL 5099.

16 RGL 22197.

17 RGL 1714.

- 15 For the purposes of this chapter, the two main periods of concern are the 27 years from 1958 to 1985 when Rathgael was for boys only, and the ten years from 1985 to the end of the Inquiry’s remit in 1995 when it was mixed. During this time Rathgael developed from its traditional reformatory and industrial school roots to become, in Campbell Whyte’s words, “a more caring and educating establishment.”<sup>18</sup>

## The Premises

- 16 Rathgael was sited on the outskirts of Bangor, not far from the A2 to Belfast and thirteen miles from the city. The site, which covered 86 acres, was selected because of its easy access to Belfast, where a large proportion of the boys in the school came from,<sup>19</sup> though public transport access was poor in the immediate vicinity.<sup>20</sup> In planning the buildings, consideration was given to recent developments in the approved school system in England, adapted to meet the differing circumstances in Northern Ireland.<sup>21</sup>
- 17 There was a senior school and a junior school, with a cut-off point at the age of fifteen. The senior school had 70 places in three house units with a pre-release flat with twenty places, and the junior school had 94 places in four house units providing 80 places and a pre-release unit with fourteen places.<sup>22</sup>
- 18 The need for specialist units in Northern Ireland had been recognised, but the numbers of children and young people requiring some forms of care were very small. Lindsay Conway was critical of the way that training schools were expected to meet a very wide range of needs on the same premises.<sup>23</sup> To meet Northern Ireland’s needs the solution devised in planning Rathgael was to follow the English model of house units, but to create a framework within which house units were divided by age and function, whereby different house units could adopt different approaches.
- 19 There was also a reception unit, which was able to undertake a five-week assessment of newly admitted boys, covering “educational, social, vocational, medical and, if necessary, psychological and psychiatric”

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18 RGL 1717.

19 RGL 22233.

20 RGL 5092.

21 RGL 22233

22 RGL 1716.

23 RGL 5093.

aspects. It also provided for boys who were remanded for only a month, thereby leaving the longer-stay units less disturbed by frequent changes among the resident group.<sup>24</sup> The reception unit consisted of two wings for the seniors and juniors respectively, with shared facilities such as a dining room and a classroom in the centre of the building. There were dormitories of different sizes: for eight boys, six boys, four boys and two for two boys each, making 22 bed spaces in each unit. Staff accommodation was also attached.<sup>25</sup> Two of the other house units were single units, but the remainder were on a similar architectural model to the reception unit, in pairs with some shared facilities and staff housing attached. The units, incidentally, were given names that reflected stages in Rathgael's history, such as 'Gibraltar', 'Grampian', 'Fox Lodge' and 'Shamrock House'.

- 20 There was a semi-secure intensive care unit with seven places. This provided short-term care for children who were not coping in the open school, with a view to returning children to their house units in the open school. The reasons for placement in this unit included drug or glue addiction and absconding.<sup>26</sup> There were time-out rooms, equipped with secured bed frames, heavy duty mattresses, blankets and restrictions on permitted equipment, so that there were no materials which could be used as weapons or for self-harming.<sup>27</sup>
- 21 In addition to the intensive care unit there were eight units in all, with the potential therefore to house over 160 boys.<sup>28</sup> Campbell Whyte stated that Rathgael was registered to provide 203 places<sup>29</sup> but the actual number of children and young people resident appears to have fluctuated and the registered number appears to have been treated as a guideline, rather than a fixed ceiling which it was forbidden to breach. Campbell Whyte stated that when he joined Rathgael in 1973 there were about 210 boys on the roll and bunk beds had to be set up in recreation rooms.<sup>30</sup>
- 22 At the centre of the site was the administration block, which contained a number of general services, such as offices, the laundry, the medical centre, the central kitchen and some staff accommodation.<sup>31</sup> There was also an assembly hall, known as the chapel.<sup>32</sup>

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24 RGL 22234.

25 RGL 1715.

26 RGL 1716.

27 RGL 5102-5103.

28 RGL 22235.

29 RGL 1714.

30 RGL 1715.

31 RGL 22235.

32 RGL 1715.



- 23 There were two other large blocks. The first consisted of the workshops, stores and some classrooms for the senior school. The second held the classrooms for the junior school, which included woodwork and metalwork classrooms; a gymnasium was attached, with a swimming pool nearby. There were also separate playing fields for the juniors and seniors, and additional sports grounds for matches.<sup>33</sup>
- 24 It has been noted above that staff accommodation was attached to each of the house units. The wives of the housemasters usually acted as housemothers, a development introduced on the new site. In all, there were eighteen staff houses, such that Rathgael formed a community of staff, as well as the boys and girls.<sup>34</sup> This had a number of potential advantages. At a practical level it meant that there were probably colleagues readily available to replace a sick member of staff, to assist in a crisis or to provide transport. On a more general level, the presence of a large number of staff gave scope to create supportive teamwork whereby staff knew that they had the backing of others to whom they could turn if necessary. Resident staff also often identified more closely with the school or home where they worked, and the availability of accommodation may have reduced staff turnover.
- 25 This brief description omits many of the additional facilities provided, such as equipment for the screening of films in the gymnasium, a pottery, greenhouses, a band room and so on. In short, Rathgael was provided with an excellent range of premises and equipment, equal to the best in the United Kingdom at the time of its construction.
- 26 There were also two other services for children that came under the control of Rathgael. The first was Runkerry, an outdoor pursuits centre near the Giant's Causeway, which was used not only by Rathgael but by other training schools and services for children and young people.
- 27 The second was the East Side Project, which offered 24-hour support for young people who had settled in east Belfast following discharge from Rathgael. The scheme offered help in finding work, in developing self-sufficiency and in participating in the community. It went on to take referrals from all over Belfast and had three houses for those who had nowhere else to live. Lindsay Conway said that the concept arose from the Black Report and the proposal was based on research he had undertaken

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33 RGL 22235.

34 RGL 22235.

concerning young people with no home base.<sup>35</sup> Campbell Whyte reported that this scheme won a national award in 1984.<sup>36</sup>

## The Aims

28 The official aim of the school was:

“to restore the child or young person to society better equipped mentally and emotionally to cope with the environment from which he came and to accustom him to the habit of work. It is a process of readjustment and social re-education, based on an understanding of the personality, history, abilities and aptitudes of each boy or girl and a knowledge of the family situation, and is promoted by

- (a) a stable environment which enables remedial influences to be brought to bear and progressive training to be given;
- (b) contact with the home; and
- (c) help and supervision after the boy or girl leaves the school.”<sup>37</sup> <sup>38</sup>

## Daily Life

### Care and Justice Sides

29 The two parts of Rathgael were known as the care side and the justice side, and the split reflected the conclusion of the Black Report that young offenders should be dealt with separately from children with acute needs and behaviour problems who were non-offenders. The second group were known colloquially within Rathgael as the ‘care bears’.<sup>39</sup> The division was not rigidly observed and some children were moved from one side to the other when it was felt that their needs would be met more appropriately on the other side. HIA 434, for example, was placed on the care side until he was involved in joyriding, when he was moved over to the justice side, which he found “very different”, being “treated as if I were a criminal.”<sup>40</sup>

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35 RGL 5112.

36 RGL 1720.

37 RGL 1715.

38 This quotation is taken from *A Social Psychological Evaluation of a Community Service Programme for Young Offenders in a Northern Ireland Training School*, a thesis by Campbell Whyte, August 1981, pp.30-31.

39 RGL 083.

40 RGL 113.

## House Units

- 30 Each house unit had its own team of staff led by a house warden, comprising housemasters and housemothers, together with teachers and instructors undertaking extraneous duties additional to their teaching role. Houses were encouraged to develop their own character and children were allocated to house units which were thought to match their particular needs.<sup>41</sup> In the reception house on the care side, residents were locked in their dormitories at night and had to call the care staff if they needed to go to the toilet. The other houses were open.<sup>42</sup>

## Daily Routine and Education

- 31 The residents were awoken at 7.30am, and after breakfast at 8.00am there were morning jobs and some free time before school.<sup>43</sup> The school day started with assembly at 9.00am, held in a building called the chapel. The content of assemblies was non-religious and was designed to give the children positive messages, though at least two of the witnesses recalled assemblies as being Catholic services.
- 32 There was then classwork or work in workshops until lunch, which was served in the house units, followed by more classwork and workshops until about 4.00pm.<sup>44</sup> In the junior school, subjects taught included literacy, mathematics, geography, history and physical education, where possible matching the junior intermediate school curriculum in mainstream schools.
- 33 Several witnesses spoke about the quality of education provided at Rathgael, and most, but not all, were critical. Among the critics, HIA 200 said that the education was “very basic”, such that he had difficulty adjusting when he returned to Bangor High School.<sup>45</sup> HIA 429 said:
- “...school in Rathgael...was like going back to primary school. I have dyslexia and no additional help or assistance was provided. The education was very poor and my level of education fell. For that reason I had more interest in practical subjects like woodwork, gardening and metal work than the academic subjects.”<sup>46</sup>

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41 RGL 1716.

42 RGL 111.

43 RGL 5103.

44 RGL 1718.

45 RGL 041.

46 RGL 108.

HIA 172 said:

“If Rathgael was supposed to fulfil a child’s educational needs I could never understand why I left Rathgael unable to read and write. I have taught myself everything that I know.”<sup>47</sup>

- 34 HIA 231 said that school work was not compulsory and there were weeks at a time when she did not attend. The classes were of mixed ability, with twelve to fifteen children in a class. She said that her education essentially stopped when she went to Rathgael and she left without any qualifications.<sup>48</sup> Her education report from Rathgael described her as ‘very difficult to teach’.<sup>49</sup>
- 35 HIA 503 said that her:
- “education consisted of colouring in pictures. I was not taught anything of value and I left there without any qualifications.”<sup>50</sup>
- 36 By contrast with the critics, HIA 267 thought the education system was “fairly good” and he learnt to read, though he obtained no qualifications.<sup>51</sup> HIA 434 said that although some of them had short tempers the teaching staff were good to him. He explained that the whole school was put into five streamed classes, with the least able in Form 1 and the “very clever” in Form 5. This meant that the classes had mixed age groups and there was no set curriculum.<sup>52</sup>
- 37 The PE teacher, RG 17, was described as being good at sport but very strict. He had a real talent for gymnastics and he trained a team of boys from Rathgael to give displays.<sup>53</sup> HIA 267 found him “a positive influence”;<sup>54</sup> others were afraid of him. HIA 429 alleged that RG 17 threw him into the swimming pool, which scared the life out of him, but he became a strong swimmer.<sup>55</sup> RG 17 denied having done so, and said it was his target to teach all boys at Rathgael to swim.<sup>56</sup>
- 38 HIA 172 said that RG 17 walloped him a few times, and that he was quite a violent man who:

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47 RGL 021.

48 RGL 049.

49 RGL 46566.

50 RGL 132.

51 RGL 067.

52 RGL 112.

53 Day 152, p.181.

54 RGL 068.

55 RGL 108.

56 RGL 31323.

“would slam children into the ground, twist their arms up their backs, use swimming flippers to whack them across the legs and throw things at them.”<sup>57</sup>

HIA 429 said that RG 17 hit many boys with the largest plimsoll available at Rathgael.<sup>58</sup> RG 17 denied having done so<sup>59</sup> but several witnesses made mention of the plimsoll, which even had a name, being known as “Rufus”.<sup>60 61</sup>

- 39 Despite RG 17’s denial, he stands out as the member of staff whom the witnesses accuse most frequently of physical abuse, and we accept the allegations that he applied informal corporal punishment which was unrecorded and contrary to the Training School Rules. RG 17 achieved success in Rathgael’s sporting activities, nonetheless some of the children were afraid of him. **We consider RG 17’s practice of using frequent unrecorded informal corporal punishment unacceptable, amounting to systemic abuse.**
- 40 In the senior school the main focus was on trade training, with departments to teach building, metalwork, motor engineering, painting, decorating, joinery, catering and horticulture, leading on to City and Guilds awards from the 1980s onwards. HIA 400, for example, completed a City and Guilds in motor engineering.<sup>62</sup> Classwork was optional for seniors.<sup>63</sup> Young people with a high level of academic ability attended local schools in the Bangor area to continue mainstream education and obtain qualifications.<sup>64</sup>
- 41 HIA 503 said that she had work experience in the kitchens, but that she spent the entire fifteen weeks making sandwiches. When the kitchen staff took their breaks she was locked in the kitchen on her own.<sup>65</sup>
- 42 At 4.00pm the children and young people returned to their house units for dinner and evening activities. These included classes in photography, art and typing as well as playing pool, table tennis, board games, watching television and doing hairdressing. There were also sporting competitions, mostly for football, pool and gymnastics and Rathgael Gymnastics Club

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57 RGL 020-021.

58 Day 152, p.161.

59 RGL 31323.

60 RGL 040.

61 Day 152, p.26.

62 RGL 095.

63 RGL 1717.

64 RGL 5095.

65 RGL 132.

put on displays<sup>66</sup> HIA 200 also mentioned “patter tennis” played on miniature courts.<sup>67</sup> HIA 400 said that each house had to build a raft and they were raced across the lake.<sup>68</sup> These competitive activities appear to have taken place for the most part while Rathgael was for boys only.

- 43 HIA 503 complained that the residents were not allowed to select which television programme was watched, and that the pool table could only be used on the infrequent occasions that staff could accompany them.<sup>69</sup> Bedtime was at 9.00pm.<sup>70</sup> The nightwatchman had two large Alsatians which he took with him when he patrolled the dormitories.<sup>71</sup>

### Activities

- 44 At weekends there was house cleaning on Saturday mornings, church parades in Bangor Protestant churches on Sunday mornings, and Sunday services conducted by chaplains on Sunday afternoons. HIA 429 said that there was always something planned for them to do at weekends, such as walks, swimming or videos. He joined the cycling club and was allowed to cycle home to stay with his father in Belfast.<sup>72</sup> In general, though, there was more free time.
- 45 Campbell Whyte also described a Community Service Programme, which he initiated in 1974. Young people were placed in a variety of community-based programmes (Rudolf Steiner, PHAB, and the Avoca Play Group, for example) where they took on the role of ‘treaters’ rather than being treated themselves. Over 150 boys participated in the first five-and-a-half-years, with minimal trouble.<sup>73</sup>

### Health Care

- 46 There was a matron and two qualified nurses to provide 24-hour first aid cover, there were daily ‘sick bay parades’, a doctor visited weekly, and dental care was available on site.<sup>74</sup> When the girls from Whiteabbey joined Rathgael, a female doctor was also appointed.<sup>75</sup> The sick bay facilities were replaced in the 1980s by care provided by nurses visiting the house units.

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66 RGL 1720, 1721.

67 RGL 041.

68 RGL 096.

69 RGL 130.

70 RGL 5103.

71 RGL 066.

72 RGL 108.

73 RGL 1719.

74 RGL 1721.

75 RGL 5096.

- 47 A number of witnesses were critical of the health care which they received. HIA 200 wrote:

“There was no medical or dental care. There was a Matron ... but she just seemed to dispense Strepsils for every ailment.”

Although medical investigations had identified a minor degree of cerebral palsy among other things when she was little, HIA 198 said that she was not given any medication or medical help at Rathgael.<sup>76</sup>

- 48 HIA 438 suffered appendicitis at a weekend, and at first was only given paracetamol by a locum doctor. When examined by Rathgael’s own doctor on Monday after a weekend of agony, she was admitted to hospital for emergency surgery.<sup>77</sup>
- 49 HIA 182 said that ambulances were never called when children self-harmed as the staff did not want to draw attention to Rathgael. Instead, RG 11, who was a senior member of staff resident on site, was to be called.<sup>78</sup> RG 11 agreed that he might be called at night, depending upon the severity of the self-harming but denied that he would fail to call an ambulance or take a child to hospital if that was required.<sup>79</sup>
- 50 When HIA 438 had her first period she absconded to talk to her mother, and when she was returned to Rathgael she was put in isolation, and no one talked to her about the changes that were happening to her body.<sup>80</sup>
- 51 Staff found out that HIA 434 was having a consensual relationship with a girl at Rathgael, and he was required to attend the VD clinic every three weeks for about three months before he was informed that he was disease-free. He was then given sex education and some condoms.<sup>81</sup> He said he felt humiliated by this treatment, but we consider that the staff were taking sensible precautions.<sup>82</sup>

### Clothing

- 52 In the earlier years, residents were required to wear a uniform but from the early 1980s they wore their own clothes.<sup>83</sup> HIA 172 said that his own

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76 RGL 034.  
77 RGL 120.  
78 RGL 025.  
79 RGL 4824-4825.  
80 RGL 120.  
81 RGL 114.  
82 Day 153, p.135.  
83 RGL 1721.

clothes were removed on admission in 1986, and they were all made to wear outdated humiliating clothes which marked them out as being from Rathgael when they were in Bangor.<sup>84</sup>

## Food

- 53 Food was cooked in a central kitchen, but children ate in their own house units. HIA 267 thought the food was good<sup>85</sup> but HIA 386 and HIA 389 were both critical of the food, alleging that they were forced to eat undercooked meat, and as a consequence they both became vegetarians despite being provided with the same vegetarian dish every day.<sup>86</sup> HIA 503 also complained of the lack of choice for vegetarians.<sup>87</sup> HIA 198 described the food as disgusting and unfit for human consumption; the meals reaching Shamrock House were cold and rubbery.<sup>88</sup> HIA 83 said that the food was “horrible and watery”, and that they had to drink from “a plastic cup and eat off plastic plates”.<sup>89</sup>
- 54 From a staff perspective Campbell Whyte noted that there were complaints about the food in the 1970s and early 1980s, but measures were taken to improve the food and the chef was replaced.<sup>90</sup>
- 55 Most of the complaints quoted above concerning education, health care, food and other aspects of daily living relate to the period from 1985 to 1995 when Rathgael served both boys and girls. While some of the complaints may well have been justified and represented instances of poor childcare, we do not consider any of them to have amounted to systemic abuse, with the exception of RG 17’s informal use of corporal punishment.

## Family Contact

- 56 Visits by the residents’ families were permitted, but the siting of Rathgael made visiting difficult for those who lived in parts of the province away from Belfast.<sup>91</sup> HIA 200’s father visited him every week, but his mother had moved to Portrush and she visited less frequently as the journey was difficult.<sup>92</sup> HIA 400 was visited regularly by his mother, but his father was

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84 RGL 015.  
85 RGL 066.  
86 RGL 082-083, 091.  
87 RGL 129.  
88 RGL 034.  
89 RGL 003.  
90 RGL 1721.  
91 RGL 5092.  
92 RGL 041.



an alcoholic and HIA 400 was “not sure he was even aware I was in any institution”.<sup>93</sup> HIA 386 said she never had visitors, but she put that down to lack of interest on the part of her parents.<sup>94</sup> HIA 231 was visited weekly by her grandmother, whom she saw as the only positive influence in her life at that time, but she did not feel able to disclose the sexual abuse she was suffering to her grandmother, who was in her mid-seventies.<sup>95</sup>

- 57 Some of the witnesses had siblings and cousins who were also in Rathgael at the same time, but sometimes living in other units. HIA 503 said that when her brother was gravely ill she only learnt of it from her sister, who was in the care side. She was not allowed to visit him in hospital. When another brother visited and brought her a television, he was not allowed to see her, as he had not made an appointment, and she was not permitted to have the TV set.<sup>96</sup> When she spoke to a brother on the phone, HIA 503 was told that their conversations were not appropriate, and this resulted in her “pushing him away and rejecting contact with him”, which she believed was a deliberate tactic to alienate her from her family.<sup>97</sup>
- 58 Residents had home leave, depending upon their progress in the school,<sup>98</sup> but children and young people had long journeys on their own if they lived some distance away.<sup>99</sup> Residents assessed as being eligible for leave were granted two-week blocks of time at home, and during this time staff from the house unit visited to monitor progress.<sup>100</sup> We consider the arrangements for family contact to have been broadly satisfactory.

## Absconding

- 59 Absconding was a serious problem at Rathgael. The school was not a closed institution; it was not far from Belfast and the main road went near the school, so that absconding was fairly easy for any boy or girl wishing to run away. Absconding put children at risk as they could become involved in offending while on the run, and they were vulnerable to exploitation and danger, particularly during the Troubles.<sup>101</sup>

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93 RGL 096.

94 RGL 085.

95 RGL 048.

96 RGL 131.

97 RGL 132.

98 RGL 1722.

99 RGL 5092.

100 RGL 5104.

101 A fuller description of problems associated with absconding and details of research findings are to be found in chapter 12 on St Patrick’s Training School.

60 Lindsay Conway stated that:

“no child would have willingly chosen to come to Rathgael, although many knew that there was no other option.”<sup>102</sup>

He felt that absconding was triggered at times by external factors such as a wish to see a relative in hospital, but in other cases it was to avoid bullying by other residents or perceived mistreatment.<sup>103</sup> It is not surprising, therefore, that a substantial number chose to run away.

61 Campbell Whyte wrote:

“Every time a young person absconded, this was reported to the local police. Rathgael received a lot of criticism because of the high level of absconding. In response to criticism by the North Down MP Jim Kilfedder, the *Spectator* newspaper ran an article on the school on 22 September 1991. Statistics at the time of the article in relation to absconding showed that in the previous six months, 54% had not absconded; 34% had absconded but many were just late back from home leave, a training programme or work, whilst some were absent for a day or two; only 12% were persistent and serious absconders - these were the cause of most concern.”<sup>104</sup>

62 Caning was administered by the head or his deputy,<sup>105</sup> and this would appear to have been the way in which absconding was dealt with in earlier decades. In 1977 boys were put into corduroy shorts and baseball boots with no laces to prevent absconding.<sup>106 107</sup> HIA 200 said that the police usually caught absconders quite quickly.

“The staff would isolate you for a time after you were returned and you were made to wear shorts instead of jeans. The boys who ran away were closely supervised by a housemaster after they were caught.”<sup>108</sup>

HIA 434 said that when he had absconded he was left for ten to fourteen days in an isolation room in his underwear, with a plastic mattress and a sheet. He was brought food on a tray three times a day, but was otherwise left isolated.<sup>109</sup> His records show that HIA 434 absconded on seventeen

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102 RGL 5094.

103 RGL 5099.

104 RGL 1724.

105 Day 152, p.81.

106 RGL 003.

107 Day 152, p.75.

108 RGL 041.

109 RGL 112.

occasions, but there is no reference to the lengthy spell in isolation which he alleged.<sup>110</sup>

- 63 Because of the scale of the problem, the Adolescent Psychology Research Unit (APRU) was commissioned to carry out a review in 1991, which criticised the failure to monitor absconding. A Monitoring Group was set up therefore “to monitor, understand and reduce absconding.” There were follow-up reports in 1992 and 1993. In 1992 it was noted that:

“The number of absconders and number of abscondings in the Rathgael Centre has declined significantly in both absolute and proportionate terms. The number of absconders is reduced by 37%; the number of abscondings is reduced by 60%. This is attributable to the strategic management approach implemented by Senior Management. Given the inherent unpredictability and fluctuating nature of absconding the difficulty in sustaining this reduction should not be underestimated.”

- 64 Action was taken to address this problem:

“The young people were counselled on the likely consequences of absconding, and sanctions, such as depriving them of taking part in activities or freedom of movement were applied. In addition a number of measures were in place to reduce absconding in relation to:

- carrying out detailed research to ensure improvements, if any, could be measured;
- provision of a residential programme for homeless children outside North Down; and
- and continuation of work on providing a semi-secure building to enable the more serious absconders to be locked in their rooms at night.”<sup>111</sup>

- 65 The number of abscondings increased again in 1993, probably in part because of a 25% increase in admissions. The significant point as far as this Inquiry is concerned, however, is that Rathgael management recognised the seriousness of the problem and took sensible measures to address it.

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110 RGL 994-99.

111 RGL 1724.

## The Management of Difficult Behaviour

### Corporal Punishment

- 66 In the early years, caning was still permitted, subject to the Training School Rules, but Campbell Whyte, who joined the staff in 1974, said that he never witnessed or administered corporal punishment. When corporal punishment was abolished in state schools under the Education (Corporal Punishment) (Northern Ireland) Order 1987 a Directive was issued concerning training schools and the practice stopped.

### Points Systems

- 67 Campbell Whyte reported that “There was very little violence in Rathgael and none against staff until the last few years”.<sup>112</sup> RG 24, however, said that “both verbal and physical assaults on staff [were] not uncommon”<sup>113</sup> and cited extracts from board minutes.<sup>114</sup> When a pupil was disruptive in the classroom, ‘contracting’ was introduced, whereby an agreement was made with the pupil to earn points for improved behaviour.<sup>115</sup>
- 68 There was also a points system to reinforce good behaviour. Marks were allocated by staff for good behaviour in class and in the house unit and for performance at school or in the workshops, for house-cleaning and for tidiness of rooms, as well as sporting activities. There were weekly ‘Mentions Meetings’ to discuss children’s conduct and small monetary rewards were given.<sup>116</sup> High scores were rewarded with:

“...full pocket money, full home leave and full participation in sporting and weekend activities.”<sup>117</sup>

Negative scores could result in sanctions such as:

“...reduction of pocket money, withdrawal of home leave, withdrawal of sporting activity and early beds.”<sup>118</sup>

The Mentions Meetings were attended by all the residents and the house staff, and were held on Friday afternoons; they were also used to discuss activities for the weekend and routine matters concerning the house unit.

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112 RGL 1717.

113 RGL 5098.

114 RGL 22790-22797.

115 RGL 1718.

116 RGL 1723.

117 RGL 5104.

118 RGL 5104.

## Sanctions

- 69 Sanctions were based on the withdrawal of privileges such as pocket money, television, swimming trips, home leave and outings.<sup>119</sup> Campbell Whyte nonetheless acknowledged that:
- “There is no doubt that there was a difficulty in getting the balance right between care and control.”<sup>120</sup>
- 70 Rather than deprive the residents of cigarettes completely, RG 5 chose to cut their cigarettes shorter, “At times...shortened to an inch long”. HIA 503 said that this led to tensions among the residents, as any confiscated cigarettes were usually returned later on, while the parts of the cigarettes which were cut off were destroyed, which was resented.<sup>121 122</sup>
- 71 HIA 267 said that, as a punishment, boys were given small hammers to chip tiles away from a swimming pool. Their hands were blistered and they had no protection against the dust. He considered this a degrading form of child labour.<sup>123</sup>

## Close Supervision

- 72 Campbell Whyte reported that he was aware of three suicide attempts, though none were successful due to the vigilance of the night supervisors. There were other instances of self-harm through children cutting themselves or swallowing glass. To address this problem, Campbell Whyte set up a Self-Injury Monitoring Group which met monthly, monitored patterns of behaviour and considered any practical measures required, such as closer supervision.<sup>124</sup> Children and young people who self-harmed were often transferred to Shamrock House or Fox Lodge where such behaviour was more easily monitored and managed, with the close support of the APRU.<sup>125</sup>

## Restraint and Isolation

- 73 In the event of difficult behaviour, young people were frequently restrained and placed in secure rooms, such as the Shamrock Room. HIA 503 wrote:
- “In my room at Rathgael there was no handle on the inside of my

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119 RGL 1723-1724.

120 RGL 1717.

121 RGL 130.

122 Day 155, p.108.

123 RGL 066.

124 RGL 1726.

125 RGL 5110.

door, which was locked at night. There was a glass window in the door and staff would peer through this at night when I was in bed. We had buzzers in our room that we had to ring for staff to accompany us to the bathroom. I have always suffered from a weak bladder and would have to urinate frequently. When I would press the buzzer, staff would ignore it and I would have had to urinate in a container and dispose of the contents out the window. In place of a mattress I had a blue gymnastic mat. I had no bed sheet to cover the mat. I had one thin blanket and a pillow. During the winter months I was very cold.”<sup>126</sup>

- 74 HIA 503 was critical of the use of isolation, seeing it as pointless and inhuman; she argued that it did not solve children’s problems and that staff needed to talk to the residents, rather than shut them away.<sup>127</sup> HIA 198 endorsed HIA 503’s description. Young people in Shamrock House had to ask to go to the toilet and they were accompanied by a member of staff. During the daytime they had to remain in one room, watching television together, and they were never allowed to be on their own. Bedroom doors were locked at night time.<sup>128</sup> They attended school, but were limited to colouring in pictures, completing crosswords and playing games on the computer.<sup>129</sup> In oral evidence she said that they were just sitting around doing nothing.<sup>130</sup>

## Discharge

- 75 The ultimate sanction if Rathgael staff could not manage a young person’s behaviour was removal to Millisle borstal or, later on, the Young Offenders Centre. This entailed endorsement by the NIO and an order signed by a lay magistrate. Campbell Whyte recalled two such instances.<sup>131</sup>

## Case Management

- 76 Some children and young people were admitted to Rathgael in the first place as they required care because of a crisis in their personal or family life; this was often on a short-term or interim basis. Others were placed at Rathgael because of their offending. As noted above, these two groups were dealt with separately in the care and justice sides of Rathgael respectively.

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126 RGL 129.

127 Day 155, p.91.

128 RGL 033.

129 RGL 034.

130 Day 155, p.72.

131 RGL 1727.

- 77 In each side, children were admitted to reception houses so that their needs could be assessed before being moved on to other units. In 1982 Campbell Whyte introduced Independent Assessment Treatment Profiles as a mechanism to develop an interdisciplinary approach to deal with the particular problems of individual residents, and he said it was deemed successful.<sup>132</sup>
- 78 Following assessment, residents' progress was observed and monitored. Staff were provided with sheets which gave them the information they required for the coming day or night, and they recorded any events that occurred on these sheets. If there were incidents, an additional form was completed, and if an incident was serious, it was drawn to the attention of senior staff.<sup>133</sup>
- 79 In Campbell Whyte's time, members of the Adolescent Psychological Research Unit visited Rathgael every day, and Dr Clenaghan, a psychiatrist, visited the school weekly.<sup>134</sup>
- 80 Lindsay Conway noted that when Training School Orders were made, the requirements were inflexible and some young people regressed after their first year at Rathgael because of uncertainty about their future placements.<sup>135</sup>

## Discharge and Aftercare

- 81 Under the Training School Rules, it was a requirement that schools should provide aftercare. The discharge of residents related to the progress they had made and Rathgael Management Committee had a sub-committee which monitored the progress of boys and girls and decided when they should be released on licence. The licence was for a minimum of a year but, in accordance with a formula, it might have lasted up to nearly three years. The school was required to find appropriate accommodation (such as the child's family, boarding out, approved landlords or supported housing) and an occupation (return to mainstream education if young, higher education, supervised work placements or employment).<sup>136</sup>

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132 RGL 1719.

133 RGL 5106.

134 RGL 1718.

135 RGL 5092.

136 RGL 1728.

- 82 An aftercare team was established, which evolved into a small community care department responsible for the oversight of aftercare of young people who had left Rathgael. Social workers were introduced to residents at an early stage and they then followed them through to discharge and during their aftercare on licence. The social workers provided support and supervision; liaison with schools; help with employment and work schemes; links with social services and probation; and the provision of reports to other agencies and courts.<sup>137</sup>
- 83 Witnesses provided very little information about the aftercare which they received. HIA 200 spoke appreciatively of the aftercare provided by RG 18 in his own time; he not only visited HIA 200 but also bought him hampers. Lindsay Conway, a senior member of staff, visited HIA 200 to check that all was going well, and he also attended court to support him.<sup>138</sup>
- 84 The East Side Project mentioned above, provided accommodation for young people who had no families to whom they could return, and this type of provision was expanded to include units in other parts of Belfast. In short, although the evidence is limited, it would seem that Rathgael fulfilled its aftercare obligations well.
- 85 HIA 268 said that one of her friends, RG 37, told staff that she did not want to return to her grandparents when discharged as she was being abused. She alleged that staff ignored this and on her first weekend home RG 37 took her own life.<sup>139</sup> A detailed report explains the work undertaken with RG 37 in the months prior to her death. She had earlier been subject to severe mood swings, but was apparently contented and positive about moving to live with her grandparents, and her suicide was a shock to all who knew her.<sup>140</sup> We accept the findings of the report and do not believe that there are grounds for criticising Rathgael.

## Staffing

- 86 No information is available concerning staffing during Rathgael's earlier decades, but the information provided concerning the later years suggests that staffing numbers and training were satisfactory. Campbell Whyte stated that all the teachers were qualified, and that the care staff held either the Certificate of Qualification in Social Work or the Certificate

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137 RGL 1720, RGL 5111, RGL 23888.

138 Day 152, p.44.

139 RGL 074.

140 RGL 28162-28164.



of Social Services. Such a level of professionally qualified staff would have been outstanding at that time. When unqualified staff with relevant experience were appointed they had to give a commitment to become qualified within five years.<sup>141</sup> Staff were also funded to attend local and national conferences.<sup>142</sup>

- 87 As noted above, many of the house staff were married couples, but in 1975 there were two male staff in every house unit.<sup>143</sup>
- 88 By contrast with the day care staff, night supervisors were unqualified. Campbell Whyte reported that the Inspectorate was keen to remove these staff and introduce qualified staff sleeping in on call.<sup>144</sup> This change was resisted, as waking supervision was necessary and the task of the night staff in relation to the children and young people was relatively straightforward and did not require the professional skills taught on CQSW or CSS courses. Furthermore, Campbell Whyte said that as Director he was contactable out of hours if there were problems.<sup>145</sup>
- 89 Lindsay Conway commented on the significant role played by chaplains, who provided pastoral care to young people and staff alike.<sup>146</sup>

## Complaints

- 90 There was a complaints procedure in Campbell Whyte's time. Less serious issues were dealt with at house unit level by keyworkers and team leaders.<sup>147</sup> Staff were instructed to report more serious complaints by any of the residents to line management. If there were reasonable grounds for suspecting abuse, the issue was routinely reported to the local police, NIO and Rathgael Board of Management.<sup>148</sup> The member of staff was placed on precautionary suspension as "...the welfare...of the children was of primary importance."<sup>149</sup>

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141 RGL 1721.

142 RGL 1725.

143 Day 152, p.61.

144 RGL 1726.

145 RGL 1722.

146 RGL 5095.

147 RGL 1727.

148 RGL 1718 and RGL 46333.

149 RGL 1727.

## Governance

- 91 Reformatories and industrial schools came under the purview of the Ministry of Home Affairs (MoHA), though all of Rathgael's predecessor establishments were run by voluntary boards. From the implementation of the Children and Young Persons Act (Northern Ireland) 1950 they all became training schools, but responsibility for funding and inspection remained with the MoHA. With the implementation of the Malone and Whiteabbey Training School Act (Northern Ireland) in 1956 the MoHA took over direct control of the three training schools. From 1972 to the end of the Inquiry's remit in 1995 the Northern Ireland Office took over responsibility from the MoHA, which had by now become the Department of Health and Social Services following the implementation of the Health and Personal Social Services (Northern Ireland) Order 1972. The Social Work Advisory Group (SWAG), which came under the DHSS, still provided professional support and advice to training schools by an informal arrangement with the NIO, which eventually became contractual. This role continued when SWAG was redesignated the Social Services Inspectorate, with a more rigorous inspectorial function.
- 92 Throughout its existence, Rathgael had a close working relationship with its host Government Departments and in particular the section responsible for support and inspection. Lindsay Conway wrote that the working relations between the Management Board, the NIO and the other training schools were good, with:
- “a familiarity and openness that enabled positive working, whilst allowing challenges to be made when appropriate.”<sup>150</sup>
- Contact with the Social Work Advisory Group, and later the Social Services Inspectorate, was frequent, offering ready access to advice.<sup>151</sup>
- 93 Rathgael was under the control of a Management Board which was answerable to the Ministry of Home Affairs, and later to the NIO. Members were appointed by the Secretary of State for three-year terms, with a maximum of two terms allowed. Board membership consisted of a cross-section of the community:
- “including clergymen, councillors, trade union representatives and independent individuals with an interest in youth care.”<sup>152</sup>

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150 RGL 5107.

151 RGL 5107.

152 RGL 5107.

- 94 The Board met monthly and had three main sub-committees, dealing with finance and property, the review of children’s progress in accordance with the requirements of the Training School Rules, and staffing matters respectively.<sup>153</sup> Sub-committees were also set up to deal with specific issues, either concerning ongoing matters such as the management of the Runkerry site, or topical issues such as the high levels of stress and staff sickness experienced in 1984 following the integration of Whiteabbey and Rathgael.<sup>154</sup> Board members visited the school on a monthly basis, interacting with both staff and residents, and recording their visits in detail. The Board also had oversight of the implementation of innovative thinking.<sup>155</sup>
- 95 The Director reported monthly to the NIO, covering disciplinary matters and issues which might attract publicity, including any allegations of abuse. Campbell Whyte said that he and his management team devised a five-year business plan, which was presented to the Deputy Under-Secretary at the NIO, and thereafter he reported annually against the targets laid out.<sup>156</sup>

## Finance

- 96 Finance for Rathgael was “adequate, perhaps generous” in the early days.<sup>157</sup> However, during the 1980s there were budget cuts. The senior management team, which was top-heavy, was reduced by 50% and twenty staff from the departments were made redundant, resulting in the closure of the painting and brick-laying workshops. With the exception of this cost-cutting exercise there is no indication in the records that shortage of finance affected the quality of services provided.

## Inspections

- 97 As with other training schools, the Ministry of Home Affairs was for many years responsible for the inspection of Rathgael. There were inspectors on its staff, though it did not have an inspectorate as such. In 1973 the childcare responsibilities of MoHA were absorbed by the Department of Health and Social Services. Under the DHSS the Social Work Advisory Group was set up with its own management structure. From 1973 the

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153 RGL 5108.

154 RGL 5098.

155 RGL 5108.

156 RGL 1723.

157 RGL 1725.

NIO was responsible for running and inspecting training schools but it made an arrangement with the SWAG to undertake the inspections; this arrangement was at first informal and later contractual. There was then a phase when the Social Work Advisory Group took on a less inspectorial role, offering advice and support instead of formal inspections. A more rigorous inspectorial regime was introduced in 1986 under the influence of the Hughes Inquiry, and SWAG was renamed the Social Services Inspectorate.

- 98 Only one inspection report concerning Rathgael is extant, dating to 1987. The inspection was undertaken as part of a programme of inspection involving all training schools in the wake of the Hughes Inquiry. The inspection covered two and half weeks and involved four inspectors, headed by Dr Kevin McCoy. The report indicates a thorough examination of the school and 74 recommendations were made for improvements.<sup>158</sup> Many of these were practical matters or recommended the review of various systems, but several related to locking up children and recommended a more liberal approach. The report recognised the massive changes which Rathgael had undergone in the previous four years, with the introduction of girls and the care/justice split. The lead criticism, however, related to the provision of information to residents and their families, and in particular to their opportunities to make complaints.
- 99 An inspection of Shamrock House Intensive Care Unit was undertaken in 1992 at the request of the Northern Ireland Office as part of a thematic review of secure accommodation and intensive care units, in the wake of the Pindown Report, to seek reassurances that children's rights were being observed and that the practices in Staffordshire were not replicated in Northern Ireland.<sup>159</sup> A team of three inspectors led by Victor McElfrack visited the Unit from 22 to 23 January 1992. They made nine recommendations, the main concerns being the poor maintenance of the bedrooms and the need for a second senior residential social worker to provide consistent cover, particularly in view of the number of casual staff. Of the permanent staff, four had relevant qualifications and three were unqualified, but were required to train during their first five years in post. Overall, the description of the policies, systems and resources in the unit suggested a well-run professional operation.<sup>160</sup>

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158 RGL 23626-23752.

159 *The Pindown Experience and the Protection of Children*, (1991) by Alan Levy and Barbara Kahan.

160 RGL 23798-23833.

100 Otherwise, we have no evidence that other inspections were not carried out as required, but if so the records are no longer extant, having probably been destroyed in accordance with departmental file disposal policy. There are no records of the annual training school inspections which might have been anticipated from the opening of Rathgael in 1958 to 1973. It seems highly likely that no inspections were undertaken from 1973 to 1987, as this was the pattern in other training schools during the period when SWAG offered advice and support but did not undertake inspections. It appears that inspectors visited informally and that their advice was appreciated, and the DoH have said that such visits involved the “scrutiny of practice”, though we have received no evidence of the content of such meetings or their impact on practice. The evidence of inspections from 1987 onwards has been reported above. **We consider NIO’s failure to ensure that Rathgael was inspected from 1973 to 1987 to have been systemic.**

## The Evidence

- 101 The witnesses who gave evidence to the Inquiry concerning Rathgael gave evidence in Module 7. Following an introduction by Senior Counsel on 19 October 2015, eighteen applicants gave evidence, together with two senior members of staff and Dr Hilary Harrison who represented two core participants, the Department of Justice and the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, which had prepared a joint statement.<sup>161</sup>
- 102 Eighteen applicants to the Inquiry had been resident in Rathgael and it was these people who gave both written and oral evidence. In addition, we received information concerning 40 former residents who made complaints to the police, making 58 who alleged abuse. With one important exception, the patterns of abuse alleged to the police were similar to those of the applicants to the Inquiry. None of the applicants had attended Balmoral School. One witness was resident in Whiteabbey School prior to moving to Rathgael. Two witnesses had attended Malone School, but their main concerns however, had related to other residential establishments and they did not give evidence in this module.
- 103 The 58 complainants fall into two fairly distinct groups: the 23 admitted during the first phase between 1968 and 1985 when there were only boys at Rathgael, and the 35 admitted during the second phase from 1985 to the end of our remit in 1995, who were a mixture of boys and girls.

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<sup>161</sup> RGL 1332-1334.

- 104 Not only did the nature of Rathgael change with the arrival of the girls and staff from Whiteabbey, but so did the nature of the allegations put forward both by applicants and by those who gave evidence to the police. These two phases will therefore be considered separately. Because those who spoke to the police did not give evidence to the Inquiry in person, we have considered the information drawn from their records primarily as confirmatory, and the accounts of alleged abuse in this chapter are based almost entirely on the oral and written evidence of witnesses. Two people who were in Rathgael from 1995 onwards made allegations but they were not considered, as this period was beyond the Inquiry's Terms of Reference.
- 105 Six applicants were resident during the seventeen years when the school was for boys only from 1968 to 1985, and twelve (eight of whom were girls) were there during the ten years from 1985 to 1995 when it was a mixed establishment. The number of witnesses making allegations was therefore substantially higher during the second phase. Considering the size of the school and the estimated total throughput of about seven to eight thousand children and young people, the number of applicants and other complainants alleging abuse is moderate, and in the early years, in a school accommodating 200 or more pupils, it amounts to little more than one a year. This is not to diminish the seriousness of the evidence of abuse provided by the witnesses, but it has a bearing on the question whether the alleged abuse was systemic.
- 106 During the 1968 to 1985 phase, in the evidence of the applicants there was a clear emphasis on physical abuse, perhaps in part reflecting the tough traditional regime inherited from Malone Training School. However, those who complained to the police made allegations as much about sexual abuse as physical abuse; this is the only instance in which the picture presented by the applicants' evidence differs from that of people who spoke to the police. There were also some complaints of emotional abuse made by applicants who were at Rathgael in the first phase.
- 107 During the 1985 to 1995 phase there were 26 female complainants and nine males. Of these, there were nineteen females who alleged sexual abuse, but only one male. This is clearly a radically different pattern from the earlier period. Whatever sexual abuse of boys there had been previously, it seems to have diminished considerably, while the sexual abuse of the girls became a major issue.

- 108 Four of the female complainants were admitted around the time when Whiteabbey joined Rathgael and they alleged sexual and physical abuse. The one male who alleged sexual abuse was also admitted about this time. There were also three males who alleged physical abuse and one who alleged emotional abuse.
- 109 Thereafter, only three males made allegations, which all concerned physical abuse. There were, however, 22 female complainants, who made allegations concerning a mixture of sexual, physical and other forms of abuse. In particular, from 1992 to 1995 there were fifteen complainants, ten of whom alleged sexual abuse. Since many of the residents stayed at Rathgael three or four years, this means that at this time there were always about half a dozen girls in the school who have subsequently alleged sexual abuse. Nor does this figure include any who were abused but who have chosen to speak to neither the police nor the Inquiry.
- 110 In view of the emphasis on sexual abuse allegations in 1985 to 1995 it is perhaps surprising that the number of complaints of physical abuse by former girl residents is approximately equal to the number of allegations about sexual abuse, because of complaints about excessive restraint. Physical abuse was also the main concern of the boys, though the complainants were far fewer in number. In all, allegations of physical abuse amounted to more than a third of the complaints.
- 111 Six boys and six girls alleged emotional abuse. It is not clear whether this reflected a higher level of emotional abuse than in other homes, or whether it indicates a greater awareness of emotional issues among former Rathgael residents, reflecting the type of therapeutic discussion they may have had with staff.
- 112 Nearly all the allegations classed as ‘other’ relate to the 1985 to 1995 phase. They include single allegations of disproportionate punishment, neglect, inappropriate behaviour and threatening with a gun, and two of false imprisonment. These allegations did not suggest any systemic patterns. The one significant feature is that eight people (six women and two men) alleged failure to report abuse.
- 113 The reasons for the increase in allegations in the second phase are not clear. Fewer witnesses will presumably have come forward from earlier years because of age and infirmity, but it may also be that younger adults are more prepared to complain, when in previous generations people were more accepting of harsher conditions or poor standards of care. Again,

it could be that the style of residential childcare at Rathgaeil encouraged young people to speak up. It is equally possible that there were more instances of abuse in the later phase.

## Allegations of Abuse

### Phase 1 (1958 to 1985): Allegations of Physical Abuse by Staff

- 114 During the phase when Rathgaeil was for boys only, one applicant made no complaint about the school; the remaining five all complained primarily about physical abuse.
- 115 HIA 200 provided a good example of the range of physical abuse which he alleged. He named five staff as people who had physically assaulted him in the sixteen months he spent at Rathgaeil. RG 13 was “quite violent” and was always shouting at the boys. When HIA 200 was caught lying, RG 13 slapped him round the head and face, to the point that a young female member of staff tried to intervene.<sup>162</sup> RG 16 insisted that the boys all jumped into the sea, and when HIA 200’s twin brother refused, RG 16 threw him in.<sup>163</sup> RG 16 also hit HIA 200 round the face and head when he refused to change into the school uniform on re-admission; HIA 200 absconded in consequence, and when he was picked up from his home, RG 16 apologised to him. RG 73 punched HIA 200 in the stomach when he caught him doing something wrong.<sup>164</sup> Finally, as mentioned earlier, HIA 200 saw RG 17, the PE teacher, as a bully who used his slipper for beating boys for minor misdemeanours.
- 116 In summary, HIA 200 saw this kind of punishment as “normalised to a degree” in Rathgaeil.<sup>165</sup> There were other staff to whom he could talk, and HIA 200 named three whom he rated highly, but even they did nothing if he complained of bullying.<sup>166</sup> He concluded:

“I experienced a lot of physical, emotional and verbal abuse at Rathgaeil both from the other boys and from staff members.”<sup>167</sup>

and he remembered his time in Rathgaeil as:

“an almost entirely negative experience.”<sup>168</sup>

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162 RGL 038.  
163 RGL 038.  
164 RGL 039.  
165 RGL 040.  
166 RGL 041.  
167 RGL 037.  
168 RGL 041.



- 117 Other witnesses gave similar accounts. HIA 248 said that there were no problems while he was in the Reception House, but on moving to House 5 he was physically abused by the housemaster, RG 30, who was known as ‘the Beast’. HIA 248 said that RG 30 hit boys on the head with his keys, he kicked them and he punched them. He also punished boys in other ways, making them stand in corners for hours, sending them to bed early without supper or not allowing them to watch television.<sup>169</sup>
- 118 HIA 248 went to RG 112, the headmaster, and asked for a transfer to House 7, where he was treated well by the housemaster, RG 64, but he says he was later moved to House 8, where the regime was tougher, and the housemaster punched and slapped boys for misbehaviour or on their return from absconding; their privileges were also withdrawn and they were made to wear shorts.<sup>170</sup> The records indicate that HIA 248 frequently presented difficult behaviour, including several abscondings, for which he was at times punished.<sup>171</sup>
- 119 HIA 434 recalled witnessing RG 20 restraining RG 77 by twisting his hands behind his back and repeatedly punching him in the back.<sup>172</sup>
- 120 On his first evening at Rathgael HIA 267 was punched by another boy and when he punched him back (RG 50) pulled him out of the queue and beat him with his fists, leaving HIA 267 “very fearful”. He found RG 64, who taught him English, very unpredictable and sadistic, delivering “some vicious beatings to the boys he was teaching”, knocking one boy unconscious. HIA 267 was “terrified” of him, and on one occasion when RG 64 was beating him, he fell against a radiator and cut his head. He was so upset that he absconded and on his return RG 4, who was known as ‘the Tank’, gave him a beating.<sup>173</sup> He was beaten on another occasion by RG 4 with such force that the cane broke and he thumped HIA 267 with his fists.<sup>174</sup> RG 4 denied that he beat boys in this way, but said that if a boy had to be caned he followed the regulations.<sup>175</sup>

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169 RGL 060.

170 RGL 060, 42953.

171 RGL 828, 42957.

172 RGL 111-112.

173 RGL 065.

174 RGL 066.

175 RGL 4777-4778.

121 HIA 267 said:

“I came to lose respect for all authority figures because of the experiences I had in Rathgael. I believe that, because I saw these violent encounters as a young man, I turned into a very, very violent man myself. It ruined me in the end. Even now, as an adult, I don’t back down from a fight, not even if paramilitaries are involved. Consequently, as an adult, I was stabbed twice and sustained other serious injuries, including injuries where someone tried to cut my head off. I feel I have lost almost everything positive in my life because of my exposure to violence.”<sup>176</sup>

122 It is clear from the evidence that during the first phase there were some staff who used informal physical violence in order to maintain control and punish boys. It appears to have been used as a response to misbehaviour on the part of the boys, but it was unrecorded and was contrary to the types of corporal punishment authorised in the Training School Rules. There were also staff who did not assault boys physically, but their influence did not prevent their colleagues from breaching the regulations. The practices may well have been part of the historical legacy from the way in which Malone School was run, and it has to be acknowledged that many parents and schoolteachers in the wider community used corporal punishment at this time. Indeed, the Training School Rules permitted caning, but were drawn up in part to ensure that there was no unregulated or unrecorded punishment of this type. We accept that some of the witnesses lived a life of fear as a result of the practices described. **We consider that the extent of the unregulated physical punishment applied by some staff amounted to systemic abuse.**

### **Phase 1 (1958 to 1985): Allegation of Sexual Abuse by Staff**

123 HIA 83 was the only applicant to allege sexual abuse during the 1958 to 1985 period when there were only boys at Rathgael. He said that he was told to have a shower and that a member of staff, RG 31, started to touch his private parts while he was in the shower. A few weeks later he was sent to bed early as a punishment for smoking, and RG 31 entered the bedroom and touched and rubbed HIA 83 while masturbating himself. He added that RG 31 was there every time he went for a shower. HIA 83 said he felt dirty.<sup>177</sup> HIA 83 was discharged and when he was readmitted six months later, RG 31 resumed the touching and masturbation “about

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176 RGL 068.

177 RGL 002.

two or three times a fortnight”, until HIA 83 was moved to another unit.<sup>178</sup> HIA 83 never reported this abuse as he did not think people would listen to him.<sup>179</sup> We accept the witness’s accounts of events, but do not think that his experiences suggest that there was systemic sexual abuse of boys during this phase.

### **Phase 1 (1958 to 1985): Allegations of Emotional Abuse by Staff**

- 124 Three of the witnesses from this phase made allegations of emotional abuse. Clearly, other forms of abuse have a serious emotional impact, such as the persistent fear of physical punishments or bullying, or the humiliation and guilt often associated with sexual abuse.
- 125 HIA 200 said that he felt he had an inferiority complex because of the way he had been bullied. He remembered being punched by other boys at night and there was no one to complain to, as no one listened. RG 73 used to encourage other boys to tease him, and HIA 200 was humiliated in class when RG 73 taunted him and implied he was gay, which made all the other boys laugh.<sup>180</sup> His housemaster called him “names like ‘sleekit’, ‘slimy’ and ‘underhand’” in house meetings; these names stuck and HIA 200 said he was still sensitive about people perceiving him that way.<sup>181</sup>
- 126 We accept that the use of name-calling by staff is hurtful, can undermine a child’s self-confidence and may rankle for many years afterwards, as HIA 200’s account demonstrates. It is poor childcare practice. However, in our opinion, HIA 200’s experiences are insufficient for a general finding of systemic abuse.

### **Phase 1 (1958 to 1985): Allegations of Abuse by Peers**

- 127 Witnesses provided examples of bullying, usually of younger, weaker boys by bigger, older boys. Such events were not uncommon in places such as training schools, where some of the children will have experienced violence at home and may have become disturbed and violent themselves. Vigilance on the part of staff and the creation of a positive atmosphere which encourages children to be supportive towards each other can counter bullying. The question, therefore, is whether the staff at Rathgael were alert to bullying and whether they took action to prevent or minimise it.

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178 RGL 005.

179 RGL 003.

180 RGL 040.

181 RGL 040.

128 HIA 400 saw himself as:

“a small, skinny child, who was vulnerable and weak, so I would have been a target for bullies. I experienced lots of unnecessary violence.”<sup>182</sup>

He described seeing another boy bullied at night, made to strip naked and dance on a table, having shoes thrown at him, and being made to put his penis on a table, where the bullies hit it with shoes.

129 There was a gang of five or six boys who ruled the twenty-bedded house unit:

“They did a thing called ‘hooding’. ...when you were sitting on a chair one of them came up behind you and pulled their jumper over your head and held it tightly. The rest of the unit would fly over and punch you and kick you while the jumper was still being held over your head. There was not a day that passed when I didn’t either receive or see someone else receive a ‘hooding’, a beating or be spat on. I constantly had split lips and black eyes.”<sup>183</sup>

130 One bully, RG 71, treated HIA 400 as a slave, making him run errands, clean his shoes or dry his hair. He found this humiliating and after his Christmas leave he decided not to return. Although it was winter he was on the run for a month, committing crime to survive and living in a lock-up garage and a tree house. When he was apprehended and returned to Rathgael the peer abuse he had suffered eventually stopped, partly because the abusers had been moved to Millisle and partly because he had grown and was establishing himself as a stronger character.<sup>184</sup>

131 He said that staff must have known about the bullying, but they tended to stay in the staff room, and no one dared to ‘tout’ and tell the staff:

“...you lived in fear if there was a member of staff on duty who spent a lot of time in the staff room, as you knew that you had no protection from the bullies that shift. There was not a lot of interaction between the staff and boys.”<sup>185</sup>

He attributed 95% of the physical violence to bullying by peers and only 5% to abuse by staff.<sup>186</sup>

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182 RGL 094.

183 RGL 094.

184 RGL 095.

185 Day 152, p.119.

186 Day 152, p.122.

132 HIA 400's conclusion was that:

"I think Rathgael was badly managed and therefore there was no protection for the boys from other boys."<sup>187</sup>

HIA 172 says that he became like the thugs who had bullied him, and he gave one bully a black eye. He was not proud of what he had done.<sup>188</sup>

133 Our conclusion is that the evidence substantiates the assertion that there was - at least on occasion - bullying which the staff could have prevented. Where staff actively supervised and engaged with the boys, bullying was prevented, and it took place when staff who were known to do so absented themselves. **We therefore concluded that the failure to prevent bullying by peers amounted to systemic abuse.**

### **Phase 2 (1985 to 1995): Allegations of Physical Abuse by Staff (Boys)**

134 As noted above, the pattern of allegations of abuse changed with the arrival of the girls from Whiteabbey. Only four male applicants alleged physical abuse during the second phase and, with one exception, the allegations concerned incidents which took place early in the phase, they largely related to measures taken by male staff to control boys, and at times they reflected the difficult behaviour which the staff were expected to manage.

135 There were two occasions on which HIA 429 was restrained, both of which escalated from minor problems into serious incidents. In one, involving RG 20, HIA 429 was pinned down and punched, and he attributed his current spinal problems to the way he was hit.<sup>189</sup> RG 20 denied this allegation.<sup>190</sup> In the second, an argument developed into a fight in which HIA 429 was thrown over a sofa by RG 49, the head of his unit, and to defend himself against punches, HIA 429 hit RG 49 with a poker, breaking his little finger.<sup>191</sup> HIA 429 was confined in the D Room, where he broke the window to escape, and he was moved to House 5 in the justice side of Rathgael with a view to his discharge. HIA 429 was convicted of assault for this incident, but the Director of Public Prosecutions directed that RG 49 should not be charged.<sup>192</sup>

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187 RGL 094.

188 RGL 021.

189 RGL 109.

190 RGL 4793.

191 RGL 45532.

192 RGL 109-110, 4838.

- 136 In his first few days at Rathgael, HIA 172 was hit with a back-handed smack in the face by his houseparent, RG 50, when he complained that someone had spat in his cereal.<sup>193</sup> On being moved to the care side, HIA 172 was locked in a room (possibly by RG 4) and he said his arm was twisted so far up his back that his shoulder was almost broken. No one responded when he banged on the door to go to the toilet, and he had to defecate on the floor.
- 137 A walkman which his mother had given to HIA 172 was stolen - by staff, he believed.<sup>194</sup> When he complained about staff stealing his things, his housefather, RG 49, punched HIA 172 in the stomach. As he was also being bullied, he felt under attack by both peers and staff, and started self-harming. When he rang Childline he was placed in the secure unit, House 4. When he absconded, RG 48 punched him in the head on finding him.<sup>195</sup>
- 138 HIA 172 said that his behaviour became more bizarre as he wanted to be removed from Rathgael to hospital; he self-harmed and ate non-food items, such as the components of a smoke detector. He was taken to casualty and given laxatives before being returned to Rathgael. The next day he was moved to a psychiatric unit in Downshire Hospital, before being returned once more to Rathgael and placed in Shamrock House.<sup>196</sup>
- 139 HIA 172 considered all the teachers to be violent. RG 33 punched and kicked him in a broom cupboard and RG 62 punched him in the back of the head. His allegations about RG 17 have been quoted above.<sup>197</sup>
- 140 HIA 182 was the only male applicant to allege physical abuse in the last decade that Rathgael was open. He was there for only three months in 1989 and he remained in the reception house. He said that residents were punished for “not complying with instructions, self-harming or generally messing around”. RG 11 was seen as “the Enforcer” and other staff looked up to him. HIA 182 alleged that RG 11 punched him and kicked him with his trainers while gripping him by the hair or the throat. He witnessed other young people being dragged away by RG 11 and hearing their screams getting louder. He said that other staff were aware of what RG 11 was doing but were scared of him. Another member of staff, whose

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193 Day 158, p.12.

194 RGL 016.

195 RGL 017.

196 RGL 018.

197 RGL 020-021.

name HIA 182 could not recall, also beat him up for messing around in the television room. HIA 182 said that it was during this time that he started self-harming.<sup>198</sup>

- 141 RG 11 said that HIA 182's allegations were "false and entirely without foundation." He considered the allegations to be malicious, as HIA 182 had later worked at the Lakewood Centre and RG 11 had been his superior. He listed six disciplinary issues which had emerged concerning HIA 182's work, including sleeping on a night shift.<sup>199</sup> RG 11 also denied the allegations which HIA 182 had made to the police on 24 January 2013; these allegations were of assault, similar in nature to this in his statement to the Inquiry but including further detail. HIA 182 had also told the police that RG 11 had assaulted him "probably about a dozen times". RG 11 categorically refuted any suggestion that he was violent to HIA 182 or any other resident in his charge.<sup>200</sup>
- 142 The allegations indicate the disturbed behaviour with which the staff had to cope. In some of the instances it might have been possible to divert the boys rather than confront them and use force to ensure compliance, so that the problems did not become crises leading to even more disturbed behaviour such as self-harming. Unless there are implications concerning systemic failure, it is not generally our role to make findings on individual allegations, but overall it seems that at times excessive force was used to maintain control. However, the issues involved were complex, and we do not consider the scale of the allegations as amounting to systemic abuse, as the number of serious incidents was not large, taking account of the number of boys who were resident at the time.

### **Phase 2 (1985 to 1995): Allegations of Physical Abuse by Staff (Girls)**

- 143 The allegations of physical abuse made by female witnesses to the Inquiry all related to restraint and action taken by staff to place them in secure accommodation. The evidence largely relates to the mid-1990s, though some of the people who spoke to the police about physical abuse were at Rathgael in the 1980s. It could be argued that initially the staff at Rathgael had had inadequate preparation to work with adolescent girls when they arrived from Whiteabbey, but this argument was no longer valid in relation to the allegations recounted below.

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198 RGL 025.

199 RGL 4824-4825.

200 RGL 4826.

- 144 HIA 438 was most unsettled and in her two years in Rathgael from 1988 to 1990 she absconded thirty times, going straight home to her mother, typically being picked up by the police next day and returned to Rathgael. At first she was placed in a single bedroom on her return, but later she was admitted to Shamrock House, as it was more secure.<sup>201</sup>
- 145 HIA 438's complaint was that excessive force was used in restraining her and placing her in secure accommodation. On one occasion six members of staff were involved, one of whom she bit. She said that they were "very forceful" and she thought that one of them had broken her arm. HIA 438 said that she had a very slight build and the way in which staff handled her left bruises on her arms and body, as they pinned her arms behind her back.<sup>202</sup>
- 146 HIA 438 began to self-harm and cut her arms. She saved up to buy paracetamol and tried to take her life on several occasions, but she said she was never asked why she ran away or given counselling or pastoral care to counter her negative feelings.<sup>203</sup>
- 147 HIA 386 was placed at Rathgael on three occasions, amounting in all to nearly two years. It is clear from her statement that she was going through a very disturbed phase while at Rathgael. She was being cheeky and aggressive to staff, glue-sniffing, refusing to go to sleep at night, "slicing" her arms, cutting her face and body in circles and pulling the skin off her face, causing herself a lot of pain.<sup>204</sup> Rathgael records confirm her account, with incident reports detailing abusive language, damage to furniture and equipment, lashing out at staff and a barricading incident, among other things.<sup>205</sup>
- 148 The staff restrained HIA 386 and locked her in the "care unit", known as the 'D' room or Shamrock room. She described it as a cell where she felt "totally trapped". The room had only "a thin blue mattress on the floor" and she found the food so disgusting that she became a vegetarian. HIA 386 said that she was constantly monitored, even when she went to the toilet, and she had no time to herself. Nor was she permitted to mix with other children. She felt that the staff were uncaring, "very hard" and "only here for the money".<sup>206</sup>

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201 RGL 120-121.

202 RGL 121-122.

203 RGL 123.

204 RGL 082-083.

205 RGL 44472, 44473, 44479.

206 RGL 083, 084.



- 149 She wrote that she was hit, kicked in the shins, spat on and trailed by her hair, but her main complaint was the mode of restraint used by staff:

“[RG 11] used to trail me up to the Shamrock room with another member of staff, usually another man, and I would only have been wearing a night dress. One man had me by the feet and the other by the arms. My dignity wasn’t protected at all and I used to squeal for them to let me down. All of my private parts were out and there were maybe two or three people on top of me, with my arms forced behind my back and my face squashed into the floor. If I was wearing jogging bottoms at any stage and they came down, then my underwear was on show. They didn’t let me get covered up and I was often put in there wearing my nightdress for seventy-two hours.”<sup>207 208</sup>

- 150 HIA 389 also self-harmed and took overdoses of tablets on several occasions, as she was “constantly bullied by both staff and residents”.<sup>209</sup> She made similar complaints about restraint:

“This involved being thrown to the ground, usually having my arm twisted behind my back and sat on. I was not able to breathe and was left bruised from these ordeals. Often depending on what I was wearing when I was being restrained, staff did not care if my private parts were exposed. I would have been restrained at least once every fortnight.”<sup>210</sup>

- 151 She described the D Room as:

“empty with the exception of a gymnasium mat on the floor. It was like a prison cell. The room had no windows and the door had a spy-hole. ...When I had to use the bathroom I would have had to press the buzzer to gain a member of staff’s attention, although staff often never responded. At meal times staff would throw in food to the room as if they were feeding animals.”<sup>211</sup>

- 152 HIA 231 said that:

“At times I found the way the male staff at Rathgael physically restrained me to be excessively forceful. The female staff would usually try to reason with me first if I refused to do something. They had a more gentle approach. However, the male staff [RG 48] and [RG 47] would just go straight in and physically restrain me. They were well-built men.

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207 RGL 082-084.

208 Also described in detail on Day 155, p.9.

209 RGL 090.

210 RGL 088.

211 RGL 089.

They would hold me with my head face down in the carpet and twist my hands behind my back in order to restrain me. I had a very slight build at that time. They could have held me down with one hand. I felt that the way they treated me amounted to physical abuse.”<sup>212</sup>

153 HIA 503 spent two periods in Rathgael, first a fifteen-week assessment and secondly following her committal under a Training School Order. She complained about physical abuse, and in particular about undue restraint during both her times at Rathgael.<sup>213</sup> At a case conference it was recorded that HIA 503 was physically and verbally aggressive towards staff and was non-compliant to the simplest requests.<sup>214</sup> She hit out, kicked and spat at staff, but having ventilated she calmed down quickly.<sup>215</sup> A specialist therapeutic placement was recommended, but no places were available.<sup>216</sup>

154 During her first spell at Rathgael, she was restrained by RG 3, who was ex-military:

“He put my arm right up my back and pressed on a pressure point on my thumb which paralysed me with pain.”<sup>217</sup>

On another occasion, when she wanted to stay longer in the swimming pool, RG 4:

“...took me out of the pool using a large hook and sat on me. I would estimate him to be 18 stone weight. My face was pushed against the tiles...”<sup>218</sup>

155 She wrote that during her second period at Rathgael:

“I also had to be taken to hospital due to being restrained by staff. On one occasion my wrists were very painful. At hospital I had to have splints applied to my wrists. I was usually taken to Newtownards Hospital when I sustained injuries as a consequence of being physically restrained. Hospital staff asked how I sustained the injuries. I told them while being restrained, but they never asked who in particular caused the injuries.”

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212 RGL 047-048.

213 RGL 129-133.

214 RGL 884.

215 RGL 885.

216 RGL 886.

217 RGL 130.

218 RGL 130.

- 156 “On another occasion while being restrained I twisted the muscles in my back and found it difficult to walk for several weeks. The Matron rubbed my back with a cream to relieve the pain. If I had been restrained during the night I would be in my night clothes. Staff would drag me, each holding a leg and an arm, my underpants would be visible and my breasts would be on display.”<sup>219</sup>
- 157 HIA 503 said that she still suffered:  
“pain in my knees as a consequence of being continuously [sic] restrained and slammed against the ground whilst in care.”<sup>220</sup>
- 158 HIA 389 alleged that RG 5 “constantly physically and mentally abused” her, and on one occasion, when she wanted to spend a longer time swimming, she:  
“...dragged me out of the pool using a long-handled net before she grabbed me and twisted my arm up my back. I screamed in pain. Other residents tried to release her grip on me. I had to be taken to hospital following this incident as my arm was left badly bruised.”<sup>221</sup>
- 159 HIA 268 alleged that she was injured by RG 33. Her version of events was that she had been glue-sniffing with two other girls, and when he took her to his office she attempted to climb out of the window. When part-way out of the window she was knocked against a wall by RG 33, pinned by her throat, knocked unconscious and injured. When she regained consciousness, blood was running from her head, and RG 33 knocked her against the wall again. She required six stitches at Newtownards Hospital.<sup>222</sup>
- 160 His version was that the incident took place in RG 34’s office. Her behaviour was “erratic and unpredictable” and her language was “loud and obscene”; he thought she was under the influence of some intoxicant. She climbed onto RG 34’s desk, which was positioned under a window, and tried to climb out. RG 33 estimated that there was a drop of eight to nine feet to the ground from the window. As he attempted to guide HIA 268 away from the window and off the desk she lost her footing and hit her head on a bookcase.<sup>223</sup>

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219 RGL 133.

220 RGL 133.

221 RGL 090.

222 RGL 074.

223 RGL 4796-RGL4797.

- 161 RG 33 clearly had to take action to prevent HIA 268 from climbing out of the window, and if she were affected by sniffing glue, her fall was unsurprising and her recollection of the incident may have been affected. We believe that RG 33 acted appropriately.
- 162 These accounts highlight the dilemma which is posed by restraint. It is obviously preferable if behavioural problems can be avoided in the first place, and in the best childcare practice children can often be diverted or talked out of seriously damaging behaviour. However, when a disturbed child is acting hysterically or is at risk of harming self or others, or is causing damage, restraint may be unavoidable.<sup>224</sup> If so, the type of indignities which HIA 386 and HIA 389 described can be difficult to avoid.<sup>225</sup> Furthermore, it is often to the stronger staff that their colleagues turn when restraint is required, and, as the evidence shows, the problems are accentuated if male staff have to be involved in restraining adolescent girls. The distress experienced by the girls is understandable, but it is often hard to know what else the staff could have done in the circumstances. What is more, while the use of separation rooms provided staff with temporary control over the situation, it did not provide a long-term solution, and constraining young people in this way could also have been damaging if they resorted to more extreme behaviours such as self-harm and even attempted suicide in consequence.
- 163 Dealing with such situations is one of the most demanding and difficult tasks in residential childcare. It is our impression from the evidence that: restraint was probably used too readily, rather than as a last resort; that it was applied more often than was required; that excessive force was used, taking account of the disparity in size of the male staff and the girls; and that the regular reliance on male staff to control the girls presented risks to both the girls and the staff.
- 164 The lesson to be learnt is possibly that some residents were inappropriately placed in Rathgael, even if it was the best that was available in the province. In the case of HIA 503 it was noted that no therapeutic placement was available for her. Young children requiring therapeutic placements were on occasion placed in Lissue, and young people, such as HIA 172 who spent eighteen months at Peper Harow, were at times placed in units in England, but there was no such unit in Northern Ireland. The behaviour problems which some young people presented may have been beyond the skills

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224 RGL 44480.

225 RGL 084, 088.

of the staff at Rathgael. If so, rather than blame them for the systemic failure of restraining the girls in inappropriate ways, it is probably the planners who failed to make suitable provision available who should bear the responsibility. Whoever should be held accountable, we acknowledge that the witnesses found their experiences of restraint unpleasant, painful and at times degrading and humiliating.

165 RG 47 told the police that when Rathgael and Whiteabbey were merged in 1985, "...we were ill trained and totally ill prepared and grossly understaffed." They had to take on staff with no experience.<sup>226</sup> It is not until March 1990 that there are records of staff being trained in control and restraint,<sup>227</sup> and the training materials supplied were prepared for the Northern Ireland Prison Service and are dated 1 January 1991.<sup>228</sup>

166 It was noted in police enquiries in 1986 into improper conduct on the part of a residential social worker RG 91, shortly after the merger in 1985, that there had been no training for staff at that time. He had worked with boys in Rathgael for eight years, and had had to learn how to handle situations with girls from colleagues at staff meetings. The lack of training was seen by Detective Chief Inspector Thompson as:

"a serious error of judgement on the part of the Rathgael and Whiteabbey Schools Management Board and a contributory factor in this incident occurring."<sup>229</sup>

This criticism would presumably have applied not only to training in control and restraint, but also to any problems for male and female staff from either school in relating to children of the opposite sex.

167 If, therefore, the staff of Rathgael were having to cope with behaviour for which they had not been trained, staff would presumably have had to develop their own methods of coping. We do not therefore, place responsibility for the excessive restraint described above on the individual staff members involved, but on the Department which placed them in this unhappy predicament. **We consider the lack of training in control and restraint to have been a systemic failing.**

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226 RGL 34146.

227 RGL 100544.

228 RGL 100001.

229 RGL 38275.

### **Phase 2 (1985 to 1995): Allegations of Sexual Abuse by Staff (Boys)**

168 One person who spoke to the police made allegations that he had been sexually abused, but none of the witnesses to the Inquiry did so.

### **Phase 2 (1985 to 1995): Allegations of Sexual Abuse by Staff (Girls)**

169 All the allegations considered up to this point reflected problems arising from the normal running of a training school for children and young people presenting a variety of problem behaviours. Staff may at times have used inappropriate methods of control or been excessive in their application, but they were part of the ordinary way of managing daily life. By contrast, sexual abuse should never have occurred, and it would have been known to all concerned that it was unacceptable. The allegations made by girls that they were sexually abused at Rathgael are the most serious which we had to address during this module. In all, six applicants and thirteen others made allegations of sexual abuse during this phase.

170 HIA 268 was one of the ten girls who were transferred to Rathgael when Whiteabbey closed. Soon after her arrival a maths teacher, RG 27, started to take a personal interest in her. He organised fishing trips, so that while the other residents went fishing, RG 27 and HIA 268 could stay in the van together and kiss. There was “no sex, just kissing and friendship”, and the one occasion when they attempted intercourse failed as he could not achieve an erection. RG 27 also bought her cigarettes and took her to bars where he bought her alcoholic drinks.<sup>230</sup>

171 The relationship continued for two years and HIA 268 said she believed that staff were aware, although she was never questioned. She thought that someone reported RG 27.<sup>231</sup> RG 27’s personnel records have been destroyed, but two documents have survived. A hand-written note indicates that he was to face a number of questions about being in licensed premises, borrowing cars and taking HIA 268 off the premises without permission.<sup>232</sup> The second is a minute of a meeting of the Disciplinary Committee of the Management Board, at which it was decided that RG 27 should be given a final warning for taking HIA 268 to licensed premises.<sup>233</sup> HIA 268 thought that RG 27 was dismissed or made redundant.<sup>234</sup>

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230 RGL 073.

231 RGL 073-074.

232 RGL 28515.

233 RGL 22971.

234 RGL 074.

- 172 In August 1985 (five months after the first girls had been transferred from Whiteabbey to Rathgael) a disciplinary inquiry was held into allegations of improper conduct against a residential social worker RG 91, who had kissed, and written “romantic” letters to, a girl RG 157 for whom he was keyworker. He had become emotionally over-involved, but there was no allegation of sexual abuse, and he was given a warning and moved to a boys’ unit. The police later investigated, but no action was taken, partly because of the lack of training to prepare existing male Rathgael staff to work with girls.<sup>235</sup>
- 173 HIA 198 alleged that RG 20 grabbed her with both his hands around the chest area and pulled her into the house, after she had been mouthy and refused to enter the building.<sup>236</sup> RG 20 denied this allegation.<sup>237</sup> There are also allegations which are less serious. HIA 198, for example, used to dread times when RG 2 was on duty because he would flirt with all the teenage girls.<sup>238</sup>
- 174 HIA 389 alleged that RG 20 “would often pretend to tickle me. In reality he was fondling my breasts”; she added that he also did this often to RG 23.<sup>239</sup> This was “emphatically” denied by RG 20.<sup>240 241</sup>
- 175 HIA 231 provided detailed allegations concerning sexual abuse by RG 48, who was then “a well-built man in his mid-forties”. She said that he was: “well respected by other staff and they deferred to him a lot on day to day matters regarding our welfare. There was a perception that he was beyond reproach.”<sup>242</sup>
- 176 As a typical example of her allegations, HIA 231 wrote that RG 48: “...began sexually and physically abusing me almost as soon as I moved to House 6. He did not hit me but he was always very forceful when he grabbed me and pinned me down or against a wall. One evening I was doing the dishes in the kitchen of House 6 and he came up behind me. He puts his hands down the front of my trousers and forced his fingers inside me. I could feel him rubbing himself against

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235 RGL 38263-38293.  
236 RGL 033.  
237 RGL 4793.  
238 Day 155, p.52.  
239 RGL 091.  
240 RGL 4793.  
241 Day 155, p.37.  
242 RGL 045.

me from behind and I could feel his erection through his clothing. I told him to pull his hand out and get him to stop but he wouldn't. This happened every time he and I were alone. He took his chance to touch me at any opportunity."<sup>243</sup>

177 She said that on other occasions she was assaulted in the TV room, when ill in bed in House 6, and when he was dressing her wounds after HIA 231 had cut herself, a practice which she started "as a way of coping with the sexual abuse I was experiencing at Rathgael".<sup>244</sup> RG 48 also gave her extra treats, such as cigarettes, and presents, including trainers and a Thornton's Easter egg with her name on it. Looking back she considered this behaviour as being manipulative, as a way of buying her silence.<sup>245</sup>

178 HIA 231 believed that HIA 236 was also abused by RG 48. In 1995 RG 88 complained about sexual abuse by RG 48, but when HIA 231 was questioned by police she:

"protected [RG 48] at that time because I genuinely liked him and he was good to me."

In her statement to the Inquiry, HIA 231 said that she now cringed at her failure to support RG 88.<sup>246</sup>

179 HIA 236 also alleged that RG 48 sexually abused her at every opportunity until she left Rathgael, kissing her, putting his hands under her clothing and digitally penetrating her.<sup>247</sup> There is no suggestion in her brief account of the abuse by RG 48 of any of the reciprocal feelings which she and RG 47 had for each other (described below). RG 48 denied the abuse, and said that he:

"never at any stage touched [HIA 236] in a manner which could be construed as sexual."<sup>248</sup>

180 A member of night staff, RG 82, let HIA 438 sit in the office with him and have a smoke. She alleged that twice he touched her breast through her night dress. She threatened to report it, but he pointed out that no one would believe her. She told a member of staff RG 52, who said she would talk to HIA 438 about it later, but then went home.<sup>249</sup> HIA 438 told her boyfriend, and assumed that he must have said something, as it stopped

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243 RGL 045-046.

244 RGL 046.

245 RGL 047.

246 RGL 050.

247 RGL 057.

248 RGL 4817.

249 Day 153, p.54.



after that.<sup>250</sup> RG 82 provided a detailed rebuttal of this allegation, among other things pointing out that girls were checked at night by female night staff.<sup>251</sup>

181 The sexual abuse alleged by HIA 236 is unique in this Module in that it led to an ongoing relationship in adult life. It should be noted that, although RG 47 has acknowledged that he had a relationship with HIA 236 as an adult, he has consistently denied having sexual relations with her until she attained adulthood.<sup>252</sup>

182 HIA 236 said that when she went to Rathgael RG 47 was a senior member of staff, aged 46:

“If there was any trouble he was the one who came and sorted it out. [RG 47] paid me more attention than the other girls. He came down to the kitchen in House 4 and cooked with me once. He was always playing pool with me and he knew I liked him. I was confused sometimes because of the way he behaved with me. Things started to get tense between us. I wished he would leave me alone at times and yet at other times I wanted him to talk to me. I talked to [RG 47] about the sexual abuse I suffered at the hands of family members. I felt I could talk to him as he seemed interested in what had happened to me and asked me questions. I think this is why I saw him as a father figure.”<sup>253</sup>

183 “One day I was misbehaving... [RG 47] put me in the lock up room for an hour and a half. He then handed me some paperwork which said that I was going to be sent to Maghaberry for the rest of my training school order. I was extremely upset and started to cry. He held open his arms and I hugged him. He asked me if I hated him and I replied that I probably liked him too much. He told me he felt exactly the same and that I couldn't tell anyone. He kissed me on the cheek. When I asked about Maghaberry he ripped up the paperwork. ...He walked me back to the school block and told me he loved me. I said that I loved him too but I think I was shocked and confused. I loved him as a father figure. This happened on 31st May 1994. I know the date because [RG 47] would write it in cards and letters he sent to me and in later years in text messages.”

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250 RGL 122.

251 RGL 4789.

252 RGL 4866.

253 RGL 055.

- 184 In her statement HIA 236 went on to describe how the relationship developed from kissing and telephone calls to sexual touching over clothes and then intercourse on a regular basis. The relationship continued for fourteen and a half years, and HIA 236 was hoping to conceive RG 47's baby. The relationship broke down when HIA 236 found that RG 47 had been having a long-term relationship with another woman, and that he had had a vasectomy many years earlier. HIA 236's retrospective view was that RG 47 had groomed her from the age of fourteen.<sup>254</sup>
- 185 RG 47 said that on 31 May 1994 he spoke to HIA 236 at length and threatened her with a permanent transfer to Maghaberry, because he was happily married with two kids and he was becoming exasperated with her obsessional behaviour.<sup>255</sup> He also continued to pick her up, take her home and take her to hospital, despite the obsessional behaviour. He was questioned closely by the police about his reason for doing so, and staff shortage was the only reason he could give, as he was the senior member of staff on duty.
- 186 As noted above, in his written and oral evidence RG 47 firmly denied that any sexual relationship took place until January 1977, when HIA 236 was an adult and he was weak and vulnerable because his mother had died, his father was in hospital with Alzheimer's and his marriage was breaking up.<sup>256</sup> He said that HIA 236 contacted him, and they went to his cottage in Ballyeasborough and had sexual intercourse.<sup>257</sup> RG 47 had no explanation for commencing this intimate relationship when questioned by the police,<sup>258</sup> especially since he had described HIA 236 as "exceptionally volatile", displaying "outrageous behaviour", and reacting "violently and unpredictably" when at Rathgael.<sup>259</sup>
- 187 HIA 236's account is consistent with evidence from a number of sources. A note in HIA 236's occurrence sheet records that when she was non-compliant in the schoolroom she was returned to the house by RG 47. The writer of the occurrence sheet noted:
- "I am not happy with the management of [HIA 236]'s non-compliance. Already she is being perceived by her peers as special. I have spoken to [LN 7] and he is aware of my concerns."<sup>260</sup>

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254 RGL 056-057.

255 RGL 34226.

256 RGL 4866, 34155.

257 RGL 34156.

258 RGL 34156.

259 RGL 4865-4866.

260 RGL 42050.

- 188 In a statement to the police LN 115 said she was HIA 236's key worker and she was aware of HIA 236's crush on RG 47, and the impact that his presence had on her. HIA 236 was happier when RG 47 visited her house unit, and was tearful when he left. LN 115 recalled one time when HIA 236 wanted to disclose something but appeared fearful of doing so, and said nothing. LN 115 was very concerned and spoke to RG 57 about it, who said that RG 139 had also approached him, but the matter appears to have gone no further.<sup>261</sup> RG 82 was a night supervisor and he was shocked on checking into the office one night to find RG 47 hiding under a table in the dark from a girl who was looking for him, and he was waiting for RG 250, another night supervisor, to take him to his car, which was parked some distance away, to avoid detection by the girl.<sup>262</sup> RG 82 met the girl later on his rounds and told her that RG 47 had gone off centre, so she returned to her unit. It was explained to him next day that RG 47 was being stalked by the girl, though he never learnt her name.<sup>263</sup>
- 189 HIA 231 told police in 2013 that while at Rathgaeil HIA 236 had told her that she was having a relationship with RG 47, and that she "couldn't get her head round it" as she was so shocked, because RG 47 was a senior member of staff:
- "I then started and noticed the way they were looking at each other, the eye contact, the staring and the flirting."<sup>264</sup>
- She also quoted the name 'Boo', which HIA 236 said that she and RG 47 used for each other, and said that she had been with them on a trip to the seaside, during which she had been left to occupy herself for an hour and a half, and had witnessed them kissing.<sup>265</sup>
- 190 In 2013 RG 276 provided a police statement that she had been told by RG 45 that her cousin, HIA 236, was having a relationship with RG 47, who was Assistant Head of Youth Treatment of Rathgaeil at this time. She reported this to RG 73, the team leader of the neighbouring house unit, (as her own team leader was on leave) but he subsequently denied having the conversation, possibly covering for RG 47, in her opinion.<sup>266</sup>

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261 RGL 34215-34216.

262 RGL 34218-34219.

263 RGL 4791.

264 RGL 34202.

265 RGL 34203 and RGL 34206.

266 RGL 34219.

- 191 HIA 236’s description of events showed that their relationship was conducted secretly, but it is nonetheless surprising that it does not seem to have been properly questioned by colleagues or recorded in HIA 236’s file. RG 47 was well respected and was promoted three times within Rathgael to the post of Assistant Director on the justice side because of his ability.<sup>267</sup> Lindsay Conway, the Director of Rathgael, described RG 47 as “a very capable and caring manager with a flair for organisational matters”, who related very well to young people, parents and staff, was an able communicator, worked well in a crisis, and was open to change.<sup>268</sup>
- 192 We accept HIA 236’s version of events, however, it is clear that, whichever account is correct, RG 47 and other staff mishandled events. There are times when the forming of a close relationship with a member of staff can be of real help to a child or young person, but to ensure that the child’s needs are met, the matter needs to be discussed fully with colleagues and recorded, not only to monitor the way things develop and avoid the abuse of the child but also to protect the professional.
- 193 RG 47 described HIA 236 as having “an obsessive crush” on him.<sup>269</sup> It is hard to believe that such a close relationship was not observable, and the evidence is that some of RG 47’s colleagues did have concerns, though they did not follow them through to ensure that the matter was properly investigated. Handling the crush was a matter he should have shared with colleagues in accordance with her care plan, and yet he persisted in placing himself in compromising situations where he was alone with HIA 236.
- 194 **We accept HIA 236’s account of her relationship with RG 47. His sexual exploitation of her, his failure to raise concerns about HIA 236’s crush with colleagues and their failure to question the relationship properly all constituted systemic abuse.**
- 195 As noted at the beginning of this section, a total of nineteen people have complained either to the police or this Inquiry about sexual abuse, and the instances recounted above are only examples. This would suggest that particularly in the later years - in the early 1990s - some staff had come to think that they could sexually abuse girls with impunity. Such thinking is not likely to have been in any way made explicit and most staff may have

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267 RGL 34135.

268 RGL 34277.

269 RGL 4866.

been quite unaware of their colleagues' conduct. If some staff were aware of inappropriate relationships, such as RG 47's with HIA 236, as some of the evidence suggests, action should have been taken to identify possible abuse and address it. If staff were unaware, it suggests that relationships between staff and residents were such that none of the nineteen girls felt able to disclose the abuse they have since alleged. It should be noted that two of the staff against whom serious allegations have been made were in senior positions, and they will have had an influence on the general atmosphere and attitudes in the school community as a whole.

196 **We are satisfied that a small number of staff sexually abused girls during this phase and that this amounted to systemic abuse.**

### **Phase 2 (1985 to 1995): Allegations of Emotional Abuse by Staff**

197 There is only one instance where an allegation was primarily concerned with emotional abuse. HIA 172 said that he and another boy were humiliated unnecessarily in front of all the other children, being accused of masturbating over the toilet, when the substance was actually shampoo.<sup>270</sup>

198 However, the allegations of physical and sexual abuse described above all carried connotations of serious emotional abuse. The girls, for example, bitterly resented being restrained and felt humiliated.

### **Phase 2 (1985 to 1995): Allegations of Abuse by Peers**

199 In relation to bullying, Lindsay Conway stated that staff started to question certain behaviours from the early 1980s and that there was:

“growing recognition that bullying was not acceptable and could not be tolerated when detected.”

Where necessary, action was taken to transfer children to other units, or to apply sanctions such as the loss of points or pocket money.<sup>271</sup>

200 There were references to bullying during the second phase, but they were few and general, rather than specific. HIA 172, for example, said he was “badly beaten” by other residents.<sup>272</sup> When HIA 503 approached other staff to report the bullying she was told to grow up and “sort herself out”, or that the bullying was all in her head.<sup>273</sup> This may have occurred after the dates covered by the Inquiry's Terms of Reference.<sup>274</sup>

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270 RGL 019.

271 RGL 5109.

272 RGL 016.

273 RGL 131-132.

274 RGL 46959.

201 About 1992 an Independent Representative Scheme was introduced in relation to Shamrock House under the auspices of the Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (NIACRO), providing a further assurance mechanism through external scrutiny. This was in accordance with good practice in the care of children in secure units at that time.<sup>275</sup>

## Conclusion

202 In summary, Rathgael was expected to provide care and education for young people with a variety of problems, including offending, and for some of its history it was the only residential school of this type to serve the Protestant community. The school appears to have been well financed, with carefully designed purpose-built buildings, excellent resources to provide the education, care and leisure activities required by their residents, a busy programme for the children and young people, a sufficient staffing complement in both numbers and variety of staff, good access to professional support for the staff from the APRU, and senior staff and managers who encouraged continuous improvement in working methods.

203 We acknowledge that there were some complaints concerning daily living at Rathgael, for example about food, but overall the school's professional practice appears to have been fundamentally sound, as evidenced for example in its comprehensive system of assessment of the children, the provision of an intensive care unit for children at critical times, the considered response to the problem of absconding and the excellent aftercare service. The allegations of abuse described have to be seen against this background.

204 The abuse took two main forms. In the earlier phase, when there were only boys at Rathgael, the complaints were primarily about harsh treatment and physical abuse. These complaints continued into the early years of the second phase, when the girls from Whiteabbey had been admitted. The other main form of abuse occurred in the second phase, particularly in the later years, and concerned the sexual abuse of girls.

205 Understandably the people who have come forward as witnesses had unhappy experiences of Rathgael. HIA 231 said:

“My behaviour was in Rathgael wayward and difficult for the staff to

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275 RGL 5101.

control at times. However, there was very little engagement by the staff with the underlying problems which triggered my bad behaviour.”<sup>276</sup>

HIA 198 wrote:

“I did not receive any life skills during my time spent in Rathgael, for example, how to look after my appearance or respect myself. I was not prepared for life when I left care.”<sup>277</sup>

HIA 172 said in conclusion:

“I have been permanently scarred by my experience at Rathgael. The children were brutal and violent and the staff turned a blind eye. I lived in fear of everyone around me and was beaten by both children and staff...There seemed to be a culture of assaulting children as a means of management and getting children hooked on cigarettes as a means of asserting control.”<sup>278</sup>

HIA 200 said that looking back he could see that, although getting into trouble, he was quite innocent on arriving at Rathgael, but that he was exposed to a lot of negative influences and his own behaviour escalated until he was involved in serious drinking and crime. Yet he felt very insecure and was never taught to value himself and never had the confidence to develop his career. He missed so much education that he ended up as a labourer like his father.<sup>279</sup>

206 As with the other homes we have examined, there were residents who saw their experiences more positively. HIA 182 concluded:

“Despite the issues I have with Rathgael, I enjoyed my time there in comparison to the political situation I was living in in Belfast. Undoubtedly it was a place of safety and the majority of staff could not have done enough for you and were kind people. I believe that the problems with the care in Rathgael were the result of deficiencies in the recruitment, supervision and training of staff.”<sup>280</sup>

207 In trying to understand how a well resourced training school with high standards could be viewed so critically by some of its former residents, we identify three main factors.

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276 RGL 048.

277 RGL 034.

278 RGL 022.

279 RGL 041-042.

280 RGL 025.

- 208 Firstly, Rathgael had a long history as a reformatory and training school and there were some staff who maintained traditional ways of keeping order, and these entailed physical abuse.
- 209 Secondly, the boys and girls admitted to Rathgael had some of the most troubled histories of children in the province, and they brought with them considerable problem behaviour, including offending. Despite important attempts to update its approach to young people with serious needs, Rathgael was not equipped to provide therapeutic care. It is our view that what was required of Rathgael was in some cases beyond its resources.
- 210 When being interviewed by the police, RG 47 said:  
“...all of a sudden Northern Ireland Office dropped us all in it and dropped the girls in, and it was sheer...None of us were trained for it. We didn’t know what the hell to expect and things just went belly up from then on; you were chasing your tail 24/7.”<sup>281</sup>
- RG 47’s comments may have been unguarded, but they probably reflected the truth of the situation at times.
- 211 Thirdly, in the later years in particular, the experiences of some of the girls were made worse by sexual abuse. Although the evidence we heard was persuasive, it was not disclosed at the time and the abuse was therefore not addressed. The atmosphere cannot have been conducive to disclosure and the concerns which were identified were not properly investigated.
- 212 The number of witnesses was significant. However, they have to be set against a total of up to 7,000 children and young people who were admitted to Rathgael in the course of its history, and we believe that many children may have benefited from the services offered by Rathgael and we would want to recognise the contribution of the many staff who did a good job.

## Summary of Findings

- 213 **We consider RG 17’s practice of using frequent unrecorded informal corporal punishment unacceptable, amounting to systemic abuse.**
- 214 **We consider NIO’s failure to ensure that Rathgael was inspected from 1973 to 1987 to have been systemic.**

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281 RGL 34220-34222



- 215 **We consider that the extent of the unregulated physical punishment applied by some staff amounted to systemic abuse.**
- 216 **We conclude that the failure to prevent bullying by peers amounted to systemic abuse.**
- 217 **We consider the lack of training in control and restraint to have been a systemic failing.**
- 218 **We accept HIA 236's account of her relationship with RG 47. His sexual exploitation of her, his failure to raise concerns about HIA 236's crush with colleagues and their failure to question the relationship properly all constituted systemic abuse.**
- 219 **We are satisfied that a small number of staff sexually abused girls during this phase and that this amounted to systemic abuse.**