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Chapter 8:

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Site and Premises

- 1 Nazareth House was sited on a wedge-shaped piece of land at the junction of Ravenhill Road and Ormeau Road on the south side of Belfast. The site also housed a home for older people.
- 2 At the front of the building there were rooms for visitors, where the chaplain had his breakfast after Mass. The residence for elderly men was on the ground floor on the Ravenhill side. There was a long corridor on which the classrooms were situated and beyond them, the girls' dining room. There was also a staircase leading to the first floor. The elderly ladies lived on the first floor, and there was the chapel and a large hall, used for entertainments.¹ The bedrooms for the children were on the upper floors, and during the period when many of the allegations were made, there was a partition and an open doorway dividing the dormitories, with 20 beds on one side and 19 on the other.
- 3 There were three gardens. The nursery garden for the little children had railings round it. The girls' garden had swings and climbing frames which were in constant use, and they used the garden also for skipping and netball. The nuns' garden, which was full of flowers, was only open to children on special occasions.² HIA 234 noted:

“There were big walls all around Nazareth House and there were bits of broken glass embedded in the tops of the walls, as well as barbed wire”.³

Whether this statement is factually accurate or not, it conveys the sense that the home was an enclosed community which met all the children's needs on site.

The Groups

- 4 In the 1940s there were three groups, named Our Lady's, St Joseph's and Sacred Heart, which was for the younger children. The names appear to have changed at some point, as St Joseph's was replaced by St Anne's. Our Lady's wore blue for Sunday Mass; Sacred Heart wore red; St Anne's green.⁴ The girls wore tweed skirts and matching jumpers in the colour of their group on Sundays and, as weekday uniform for their primary school,

1 SNB 80077.

2 SNB 818-819.

3 SNB 334.

4 SNB 043.

gingham dresses.⁵ In the early 1950s the seniors and juniors were divided into three groups of about thirty children in each group. During the period covered by the majority of the allegations of abuse, they were Our Lady's, under SR 31, St Anne's, under SR 116 and Sacred Heart, under SR 134. The nun responsible for the group slept in a small cell in the corner of the dormitory.⁶ In the 1960s cubicles were installed, providing some privacy in the dormitories.⁷

- 5 About 1972 the big dormitories were replaced with smaller bedrooms for three girls. The girls were also given thicker mattresses and minty toothpaste and scented soap instead of carbolic,⁸ a wardrobe, cupboard and chest of drawers.⁹ Writing about Nazareth House in 1973, SR 18 said:

“At that time there were three independent family groups in the home, each supervised by a sister; each group consisted of eight to ten children, made up mainly of two to three sibling groups. The units had just been refurbished. The layout of each was very homely, easy to manage and tastefully decorated. It consisted of four bedrooms, each with two/three beds, a lounge, dining room with adjoining kitchenette, a study room, two bathrooms/toilets, a laundry room and a bedroom for each sister.”¹⁰

About 1975 the numbers reduced to under twenty and so two groups were amalgamated. Another sister arrived, so that there were two per group. Boys were admitted about this time.¹¹

- 6 The cooking of the main meals still took place in the central kitchen, with the food taken by trolley to the groups' dining rooms. Food was supplied at no cost by Marks & Spencer at this time, including marzipan cakes, big bags of crisps and meat.¹²
- 7 When they were aged 16, the girls moved from the children's section to the girls' dormitory, where they had curtains round beds and could stay up till 9 pm. HIA 28 commented that it was great to have that privacy.¹³

5 SNB 819.

6 SNB 181.

7 SNB 330.

8 SNB 677.

9 SNB 820.

10 SNB 1580.

11 SNB 1581.

12 SNB 820.

13 SNB 049.

Daily Life

- 8 In the following sections a number of aspects of daily life in Nazareth House will be considered. It will be seen that some of these indicated poor or unacceptable childcare practice, while others reflected standards which would have been acceptable at the time. It should be noted that approximately three quarters of the allegations were made by witnesses who were in the home in the 1950s and 1960s. The number of allegations relating to the 1930s and 1940s is understandably lower, but there was a significant reduction from 1970 onwards. As noted above, the quotation of evidence does not necessarily imply that it is accepted as accurate.

Admission

- 9 It is recognised in residential childcare that the admission process is critical, not only in helping a child settle in to a children's home but also in establishing their understanding of what is happening to them, why they can no longer be at home and what will happen to them next.
- 10 HIA 387 found admission to Nazareth House in 1953 an intimidating process. She said that a nun dragged her along the hall by the hair, her doll was taken from her, and she was given the number 49.¹⁴ HIA 370 said the clothes she wore on admission were handed to other girls to wear when they went out to visit their families.¹⁵
- 11 HIA 95 said that the admission process for her and her two sisters in the early 1950s took all day, as they were stripped, bathed, put in different clothes and deloused by older girls.¹⁶ HIA 375 found the admission process daunting. She and her sisters were taken to Nazareth House by their parents but the children were never told why their mother and father were leaving without them.¹⁷ Throughout her time in the home she was tearful and clung to her sisters.¹⁸
- 12 In 1960 HIA 43 was placed in the nursery section while her older sister went into the girls' group. It was only in the segregated playground that they saw each other, and HIA 43 said that even then the nuns pulled them apart if they tried to touch each other. She felt that this was cruel

14 SNB385.

15 SNB 380.

16 SNB 661.

17 SNB 730.

18 SNB 731-733.

and inhumane, as they should have been allowed to comfort each other.¹⁹ She stated:

“My first memory of Nazareth House was the sheer loneliness which hit you as soon as you walked in the door. We were just left in beds and cots crying. The nuns never showed any warmth or affection; they never touched you. To this day I cannot stand being touched as a result of this”.²⁰

- 13 The evidence above suggests a lack of explanation, a failure to provide affection to compensate for the loss of family, and a process which was designed to accustom the children to institutional living. In our opinion the practices described failed to meet acceptable standards of childcare at that time. However, the dates of the evidence indicate that these witnesses were admitted when staffing was inadequate, and it would have been difficult for the sisters to give children the time and individual care and attention they needed on admission, though this would not excuse measures such as the confiscation of dolls.

Routines

- 14 HIA 161 said that the girls were woken every morning by a nun ringing a bell,²¹ though HIA 32 said that a whistle was used in the 1930s, when, as seven or eight year olds, their first task was to go in their nightdresses and bare feet to polish the chapel.²² HIA 327 described SR 31 coming into the dormitory and clapping her hands to get everybody up.²³ HIA 171 said that they got up each morning at seven, knelt down by their beds to say their prayers, made their beds and then went to Mass. When they came back from Mass they had breakfast (as with other meals) in silence.²⁴ According to HIA 20, this practice changed about 1960.²⁵
- 15 SR 18 said that by the 1970s older children got up at 7.30 am to give them time to walk to school, while younger children, who went to a school in the grounds, got up at 8am. Transport was arranged for children attending special schools.²⁶

19 SNB 710-711.

20 SNB 711.

21 SNB 145.

22 SNB 234.

23 SNB 792.

24 SNB 780.

25 SNB 181.

26 SNB 1580.

- 16 In the 1970s, children were back from school between 3.30 pm and 4 pm, and after a snack they changed out of their uniforms, did homework or watched television. According to HIA 161 there was Benediction every afternoon.²⁷ HIA 117 said:
- “There was a garden with swings and climbing frames in it. We got to be outside for one hour each day. That was when you got to speak to other children and a nun would have walked around the garden with her prayer book watching you. I like to read a lot, but there was nothing to read. The TV was very limited. You had to watch mostly what the nuns wanted to watch.”²⁸
- 17 According to HIA 20 the evening meal was at 5.30pm. They had semolina pudding, or bacon and bread, or cheese and bread, but she said they always went to bed hungry.²⁹ At 6pm there was the Angelus. The meal was followed by television, games, or activities such as swimming, ice skating, the cinema, local clubs, guides, Irish dancing and ballet.³⁰
- 18 During the evening the lay staff supervised the children while the nuns spent time in their community, sharing a meal and in worship. During the earlier years, while the nuns were praying, older girls were left in charge. HIA 43 observed that as the older girls had been bullied themselves, they in turn bullied the younger ones once they had power. She said that, by way of example, even though the girls only had short dresses and were crying to come indoors, the older ones locked them out in the yard.³¹
- 19 At night the girls had to sleep with their hands crossed over their chests. HIA 14 said that SR 116 explained that this was so that they would go to heaven if they died in their sleep. She told them that if their arms were not crossed they would burn in hell.³² HIA 439 surmised that it was so that they would not interfere with themselves, and said that if they were found with arms uncrossed, they were hit hard.³³
- 20 On Fridays the girls had confession, for which they “would often make up stories about any sins we had in order to have something to say”, and there were the Stations of the Cross.³⁴

27 SNB 145.
28 SNB 780.
29 SNB 181.
30 SNB 1580-1581, 1858-1859.
31 SNB 711.
32 SNB 116.
33 SNB 204.
34 SNB 145.

- 21 Also on Friday nights there was inspection of underwear and the provision of clean clothes. HIA 129 said that in the 1940s, the clean clothes were laid out in semi-circular rows and when they had changed into them the girls had to take the dirty underwear to the nun for inspection. She remembered:

“...trying to figure out why I had to show the nun my underwear when my mother had never made me do this.”³⁵

It was reported that the girls wore slips during the underwear inspections.³⁶ though HIA 387 said the girls stood naked in the big hall and:

“If my underwear was soiled, I would be punished and called a rank, smelly, dirty girl.”³⁷

Having dirty underwear merited “a couple of whacks on the palm of your hand” with a cane, and according to HIA 62 SR 122 used to give a girl with dirty underwear “a crack round the head”. One consequence was that on a Friday night the older girls bullied the younger ones into swapping underwear to avoid trouble.³⁸

- 22 The rationale for this routine is unclear. HIA 223 was of the opinion that the purpose of the inspection was to show who was in charge.³⁹ The Order said that they were aware of these allegations but denied that they were common practice.⁴⁰ Systems for changing clothes such as that described above would have been good institutional practice in dealing with a large number of girls. We find the witnesses’ accounts about the use of the occasion to conduct humiliating inspections coupled at times with punishment convincing, and this practice was unacceptable.
- 23 Saturdays were spent by the girls fine-combing each others’ hair, polishing shoes, darning socks and, once a month, changing their bedding.⁴¹
- 24 On Sundays they went for walks and played for half an hour in Ormeau Park, but they were told not to speak to anyone from outside.⁴² If it was very wet they played in the hall.⁴³

35 SNB 018.

36 Day 99, p.177.

37 SNB 387.

38 SNB 672.

39 Day 95, p.107.

40 SNB 2093.

41 SNB 182.

42 SNB 182.

43 SNB 183.

Chores

25 The 1952 Home Office Guidance said that:

“Boys and girls should be expected to take a moderate share in the daily running of the home” and should “progress from light routine tasks, such as dusting, bed-making and washing up, to skilled work such as cooking, bottling [and] ironing...” They could also be “given some responsibility for planning meals, purchasing household goods and checking the laundry”.⁴⁴

Sr Brenda said:

“Whilst children would have been asked to carry out some chores such as polishing the floors and assisting with tidying the dining area and making beds, these chores were appropriate to their age and were not excessive.”⁴⁵

26 We received a considerable amount of evidence on this subject. HIA 166 said that all the children in the home had to do the cleaning:

“From the age of seven or as soon as you could kneel down, you’d be scrubbing.”⁴⁶

HIA 361 also emphasised the involvement of all the children, whatever their age:

“We were all trained in cleaning. We started our chores at the age of five and these would have been lighter chores. At the age of seven we would have been given something harder to do, and again, a few years later, the chores would have got worse”.⁴⁷

27 Some witnesses focused on the excessive nature of the chores. HIA 43, for example, said that they were “treated like slaves”, “forced to scrub”, “constantly down on our hands and knees scrubbing with deck brushes and orange wax”, till her arms were aching and her back was in agony.⁴⁸ HIA 223 wrote:

“We were glorified slaves for the nuns. We were exhausted. We got nothing for all the work we did”.⁴⁹

HIA 387 felt that the nuns were “trying to break them down”.

44 HIA 475.

45 SNB 2165.

46 SNB 290.

47 SNB 371.

48 SNB 714.

49 SNB 315.

28 Others pointed out the inappropriateness of some of the work for children. HIA 197 said that she had to work in the laundry. She had to rinse out soiled sheets, including bedding from the old people's home, till her fingers were raw, and to reach the sink she had to stand on a stool. She then put the sheets in an industrial washing machine, pressed them and folded them up. Eight or ten girls assisted the lay laundry workers in this way.^{50 51} HIA 37 said that at the age of thirteen she was made responsible for the upstairs bathroom, which had thirty sinks, four toilets and four baths. She also had to dispose of the soiled sanitary towels in the furnace every Tuesday which, she said, the nuns termed a privilege.⁵² HIA 29 said that her chores included cleaning, laundry work, shovelling coal into the furnace, scrubbing the halls, dormitories and church, polishing the pews, and cleaning the nun's cell in the corner of the dormitory.⁵³

29 Girls were at times asked to help out in the old people's home. HIA 61 started when aged seven, laying the tables. She said that none of the girls enjoyed working with the old men, as they tried to touch the girls.⁵⁴ At the age of nine or ten she was told to wash and lay out the body of an elderly female resident whom she had known, and she was punished by SR 116 for not putting cotton wool in her orifices. She was then required to pray for her soul in the "dead house". This incident affected her badly.⁵⁵ Sr Brenda said:

"While [HIA 61] may have helped in the old people's home, she would have been merely assisting a lay staff member or Sister in carrying out their duties."⁵⁶

The question remained whether a young girl should have been undertaking such duties at all.

30 HIA 117 said that between the ages of nine and fourteen she helped out in the old people's home, bathing old ladies, changing nappies, sitting up with the dying, and washing dead bodies.

"[SR 31] said it was to get the devil out of me and to keep me away from the other children."⁵⁷

50 SNB 694.

51 Day 95, p.22.

52 SNB 055-056.

53 SNB 011,012.

54 SNB 768-769.

55 SNB 772.

56 SNB 2149.

57 SNB 875.

The Order did not accept that HIA 117 did more than assist in the lighter duties.⁵⁸ However, HIA 335 said that in the 1940s she also helped in the morgue from the age of ten, dressing the bodies and putting pennies in their eyes, which petrified her.⁵⁹

- 31 There were additional chores at weekends and during the school holidays, ranging from polishing wooden floors in the recreation hall⁶⁰ to going up high ladders to wash the walls.⁶¹ A summertime job was the painting of the bed-frames, in which some of the girls helped the handyman.⁶² The Order said that the girls would not have been expected to paint their bed-frames every summer.⁶³
- 32 HIA 166 said that a nun or an older girl supervised the work and substandard work was punished with a clip across the ear, a punch or a kick.⁶⁴ HIA 37 said “I never once saw the nuns do any physical work, always the children.”⁶⁵
- 33 By the mid-1970s the emphasis on chores appears to have diminished; floors, for example, were mopped rather than scrubbed.⁶⁶
- 34 Even if one allows for a degree of exaggeration through the passage of time colouring the memory, it is clear that the girls at Nazareth House were expected to do an excessive amount of chores, starting at an early age. In most children’s homes domestic staff would have been appointed to clean communal areas, and the residential care staff would have participated, for example in cooking meals or doing laundry when the ancillary staff were on holiday or at weekends.
- 35 One argument for involving children in chores is to accustom them to household work with a view to having the necessary skills for independent living. However, the tasks described by the witnesses refer to a laundry functioning on a commercial scale and the cleaning and polishing of large rooms such as the dormitories, hall and chapel; this was no help in learning how to cope on a domestic scale. It seems likely that the involvement of the girls in chores on this scale was of long standing, dating

58 SNB 2172.

59 SNB 025.

60 SNB 290, 684.

61 SNB 004.

62 SNB 767.

63 SNB 2148.

64 SNB 290.

65 SNB 056.

66 Day 100, pp.85, 87, 88, 129.

back to the early days of the home, at a time when girls would have been expected to play a major part in house-work in families. Using the girls as the workforce (rather than employing domestic staff, as in most children's homes) would have kept costs down and kept the girls occupied, but neither of these arguments is acceptable as a rationale in the period we are considering. **Many of the tasks which the girls were required to perform were of little use to them as preparation for managing their own households, and in our view the excessive chores expected of the girls constituted systemic abuse.**

Bathing

- 36 Complaints about the systems used for bathing ranged from the 1940s, when there were only girls in Nazareth House, to the late 1960s, when boys were also admitted. HIA 439 said that in the 1940s bath day was on a Thursday and there were three baths of different sizes. Hair was washed in the first bath; then the girls were dipped in Jeyes fluid, resulting in red eyes the following day. They cleaned their teeth with washing soda or soap at first, but a new Mother Superior introduced toothbrushes.⁶⁷ It was also during the 1940s that HIA 361 said that on one occasion SR 145 sent her back to wash again eight times as she had a swarthy neck. She lost her temper and pulled SR 145's "habit" off (presumably the nun's wimple, as her ginger hair was visible), for which HIA 361 was punished.⁶⁸
- 37 The 1952 Home Office Guidance emphasised the need for children to learn about personal hygiene and to care for themselves. They were each to have all their own equipment such as towels, flannels, toothbrushes and toothpaste, and fresh water was recommended for each child when bathing.⁶⁹
- 38 First thing in the morning in the 1950s, according to HIA 387, the girls were stripped naked and walked down cold halls to the bathroom, which she found embarrassing.⁷⁰ In the 1950s and 1960s, bath days were Tuesdays and Fridays⁷¹ and bathing was in three stages. First, girls washed their feet and knees beside the bath; then they sat in the bath with Jeyes fluid; finally they stood in a corner to dry themselves.⁷²

67 SNB 205.

68 SNB 373.

69 HIA 474-475.

70 SNB 386 and SNB 387.

71 SNB 183.

72 Day 95, p.108, SNB 663.

- 39 Contrasting with HIA 387's and HIA 14's account below, there was an emphasis on modesty. HIA 166 said:
- “We wore a sleeveless shaped shift dress garment while we had a bath so we couldn't see what our bodies looked like. We used a flannel under the dress to wash ourselves”.⁷³
- When the girls got out of the bath a sheet was held up to conceal them while drying.⁷⁴
- 40 The use of Jeyes fluid was a recurrent theme. HIA 14 said:
- “We were bathed in Jeyes fluid and scrubbed all over with carbolic soap, including our genitals. The older girls would have scrubbed us and the nuns would just have supervised. It was awful and it made my skin and my vagina really sore. I suffered from eczema and I think it was as a result of the carbolic soap”.⁷⁵
- 41 According to HIA 327, older girls supervised the bathing and could be rough.⁷⁶ HIA 84 said that the older girls were in charge at bath times and that they used a fine tooth comb for nits, hurting their scalps. She felt that some of the older girls had been treated badly over the years and they were repeating their experiences in maltreating the younger girls.⁷⁷
- 42 HIA 387 said that there were special arrangements for hair-washing. The girls had to stand in their underwear in the yard for their hair to be washed in big tin baths, regardless of the weather. The nuns cut their hair off if there were nits, and poured Jeyes fluid onto their skin.⁷⁸ HIA 63 said:
- “There were three tin baths for washing our hair out in the yard - one for each group. We had to queue up and take our turn. The water was warm but it was never changed so you were lucky if you got washed first you got the clean water but if you got washed last the water was filthy”.⁷⁹
- 43 HIA 368 was aged eight on admission in 1969 and was placed at Nazareth House as he refused to be parted from his sister. At bath time he shared a bath with the older girls.⁸⁰

73 SNB 294.
74 SNB 294.
75 SNB 117.
76 SNB 794.
77 SNB 724.
78 SNB 387.
79 SNB 684.
80 SNB 656.

- 44 In view of the cost of heating bath water, sharing would have been common practice in many households in the earlier decades, despite the Home Office Guidance. However, **the infrequency of changing the water, the use of carbolic soap to clean teeth, the use of Jeyes fluid in the bath, the rough treatment of younger girls by older ones when bathing and washing hair, and the queuing were outdated institutional practices which should have been superseded or never adopted in the first place, and they constituted systemic abuse.**

Bedwetting

- 45 According to HIA 62 bedding was adequate though the mattresses were thin, and there was a lukewarm central heating system.⁸¹ In the earlier years the mattresses had brown mackintosh covers, presumably as a universal response to possible bedwetting.⁸²
- 46 Many witnesses reported that the nuns took a punitive approach to bedwetters. HIA 30 said that in the 1940s, children had their wet sheets draped over their heads.
- “They would be lined up inhaling their own urine in the freezing cold. Everybody lived in fear of being associated with the ‘wetbeds’”.⁸³
- HIA 62 said she witnessed SR 134 making an eight-year-old who had wet her bed kneel by her bed with the wet sheet over her body. SR 134 was reported to have said:
- “Yes, you can smell that for the rest of the night.”⁸⁴
- The Order did not accept that this happened.⁸⁵
- 47 HIA 197 said that SR 134 “degraded” bedwetters in front of everyone else, on one occasion rubbing HIA 197’s nose in the wet sheets.⁸⁶ HIA 387 made the same allegation.⁸⁷ HIA 370 both wet and soiled her bed, and she said she was punished by having to sleep in a wet bed. One night, perhaps because she had soiled herself, she was hosed down by a nun in the presence of a man. She said she went to bed, soaking wet,

81 SNB 672.

82 Day 99, pp.74 and 75.

83 SNB 756.

84 SNB 673.

85 SNB 2112.

86 SNB 692.

87 SNB 387.

unable to breathe because of asthma.⁸⁸ HIA 316 said that bedwetters had to queue up outside the nun's cell to be caned.⁸⁹

48 These practices were said to have continued when boys were admitted to Nazareth House. HIA 175 said that most children had to line up on the right of the corridor to go down in a single file to breakfast. The children who had wet their beds, including her little brother, HIA 368, had to stand on the left hand side with their sheets over their heads.⁹⁰ The Order stated that they could not accept that this could have happened.⁹¹ HIA 175 said her brother smelt of Jeyes fluid. She attempted to steal sheets from the laundry so that she could change his bed and conceal his sheets. He corroborated her account.⁹²

49 It seems that the bell and pad system was introduced about 1950. HIA 166 wet her bed regularly; her bed was moved to be near the nun's cell and a bell and pad system was tried for one or two weeks, but her bedwetting continued. About 1951-52 she attended the Royal Victoria Hospital for tests.⁹³ A number of girls used the bell and pad system, including HIA 197 when she was 13 or 14. One of the problems about employing the bell and pad was that it awoke everyone in the dormitory. HIA 124 said that when the alarm went off SR 31 grabbed her out of bed and beat her.⁹⁴ HIA 117 said that when bedwetters were given alarms, hers always went off first, and SR 31 used to come out of her cell and give her "a terrible hiding". According to HIA 30, if the buzzer system went off SR 31 "would go mad" and make the girl kneel by her bed in her wet nightie the rest of the night. Sometimes SR 31 shouted to an older girl to deal with it.⁹⁵ Girls who wet the bed were also given some purple medicine, but this proved ineffective.⁹⁶ HIA 197 summarised:

"I believe we were wetting the bed because we were a bundle of nerves" and "It was an awful way to treat a child".⁹⁷

50 SR 153 was at Nazareth House from 1970 to 1973, by which time, the children lived in smaller groups. She put all the bedwetters in one

88 SNB 381.

89 SNB 828-829.

90 SNB 162.

91 SNB 2053.

92 SNB 162, 656.

93 SNB 289 and SNB 290.

94 SNB 837.

95 SNB 244.

96 Day 96, p.58.

97 SNB 692.

bedroom, and to reduce embarrassment got them up earlier than the others so that they could take their sheets to the laundry and shower.⁹⁸ Sr Brenda said:

“As the Sisters cared for a number of children from a number of various backgrounds, it may have been difficult for them to consider the individual needs of each child. The reason behind a child’s bedwetting was clearly not dealt with appropriately and methods used to prevent bedwetting were not well known at this time. Medical advice was later sought by the Congregation to help the children and the Congregation do accept that their methods were not acceptable.”⁹⁹

“The requirement that a child carry their wet sheets and pyjamas to a laundry collection point was clearly a source of embarrassment and humiliation and ought not to have occurred.”¹⁰⁰

- 51 Although the Congregation disputed the witnesses’ evidence, we accept that it forms a consistent pattern showing that from the 1940s to the 1960s enuresis was treated primarily by punishment and humiliation. The use of the bell and pad system in the 1950s was progressive, but its effectiveness appears to have been undermined by the way in which the system was applied. If the outcome was a beating or other punishment, as well as waking other girls in the dormitory, the girls using the system would have been apprehensive. While some children require medical help, many cease to wet their beds when they relax, feeling cared for and safe at night. **The punitive approaches described in the evidence would not have given the children any sense of security but would have added to their anxiety; the measures would have been ineffective in dealing with enuresis and constituted very poor childcare practice, amounting to systemic abuse.**

Health Care

- 52 The Congregation’s evidence indicates that a GP was appointed as doctor to Nazareth House and he visited weekly, as well as undertaking the periodic examinations required by the Regulations. The evidence of witnesses suggests that on some occasions health matters were taken seriously and girls were taken to hospital, but at other times problems were not properly addressed, and the health care provided by the sisters was at times rudimentary.

98 Day 112, p.74.

99 SNB 2009.

100 SNB 1966.

Furthermore, four of the witnesses quoted below attributed life-long problems to the way they were treated at Nazareth House.

- 53 HIA 166 said that the doctor visited annually, but a nun always sat in on the examinations and the girls never complained, as the nuns would have given them a hiding for not speaking to them first.¹⁰¹ SR 145 was responsible for the “work room” where the medicines were kept, but girls were afraid to attend in case she slapped them across the ear. As an example of the girls’ reluctance to seek help, HIA 30 suffered a serious ear infection when she was thirteen but she was:

“afraid to say anything because I didn’t want to be accused of showing off and drawing attention to myself”.

She told us that SR 134 gave her a clap on each ear in school one day and it took HIA 30 a minute to recover. From then on she had serious problems, ending up in inflammation and swelling which required a week’s treatment in hospital.¹⁰²

- 54 In the 1940s HIA 335 used to sleepwalk and she said that SR 177 strapped her into bed to stop her getting out at night, though the strapping appeared to have been removed during the night.¹⁰³ HIA 166 helped a girl who was feeling sick, but was blamed for disturbing others in the dormitory. In consequence a nun hit her, first with her hands, and then with a studded shoe, splitting her eyebrow open. She put a plaster and a bandage on HIA 166’s eyebrow, and HIA 166 was not allowed in the classroom until the swelling had gone down in case visitors saw her. She was told to say that she had fallen out of bed and knocked her head on the bedside locker. HIA 166 was never seen by the doctor and the scar is still visible.¹⁰⁴
- 55 HIA 430 said that a nail went through her leg when she slipped on a chair, and it took a long time to heal but she never saw a doctor during her time in the home.¹⁰⁵ HIA 166 got three splinters in her knee when scrubbing the babies’ dormitory; she removed two, but the third became seriously infected and she spent two or three weeks in bed. The doctor prescribed a poultice and the sisters gathered round her bed to pray for her.¹⁰⁶

101 SNB 291.

102 SNB 759-760.

103 SNB 024.

104 SNB 293-294.

105 SNB 805.

106 SNB 292.

- 56 HIA 234 said she fell off a climbing frame and was knocked out, but was not treated. From this time she started to suffer headaches and problems with her vision and balance. Eventually a brain tumour was diagnosed and it was removed at the Royal Victoria Hospital.¹⁰⁷ HIA 134 broke her arm, but she said it was three days before SR 199 believed her; she then saw a doctor and her arm had to be put in a cast.¹⁰⁸
- 57 HIA 85 said that Jeyes fluid had got into her ear and her ear drum had burst, causing severe pain. She was taken to the Mater Hospital in Dublin, but they were not able to help, and it was only later in life that it was successfully treated.¹⁰⁹ When back in Nazareth House, HIA 85 told SR 145 about her ear, and she slapped the other one, saying “Now you have two sore ears.”¹¹⁰
- 58 HIA 37 commented that when girls required care, such as taking up food to girls in bed with measles or dealing with head lice, the nuns always left this to the girls and they never exposed themselves to risk.¹¹¹
- 59 In summary, there is no indication in the evidence that there was poor medical care once the health service had become involved. Perhaps because of the destruction of records, it is not possible to corroborate these allegations, but it is clear that the incidents described were significant to the witnesses, and the effects of some were still apparent in later life. **The home nursing described was very poor in terms of the failure to take some problems seriously, the rudimentary treatment given, the physical abuse on some occasions, and the lack of loving care for children who were unwell. This amounted to systemic abuse.**

Menstruation

- 60 The onset of menstruation was a traumatic time for several witnesses, as they had not been prepared for it and had no understanding of what was happening. HIA 117 said that when she had her first period she thought she had cut herself and that she was dying. She said she was put in a dark room and then brought out to the canteen and put in front of everyone to tell them she was a woman now.¹¹² HIA 62 said she was unaware that she was having her first period when on the way to her first day at

107 SNB 331-332.

108 SNB 867.

109 SNB 264-265.

110 SNB 265.

111 SNB 058, Day 107, p.140.

112 SNB 875.

secondary school. She was taken back to the home and placed in the isolation room.¹¹³ HIA 95 started periods early at the age of nine; nothing had been explained to her, she said in oral evidence, and so she did not know what was happening to her and found it frightening.¹¹⁴

- 61 Witnesses also criticised the sanitary equipment and way in which the sisters provided it. In the 1950s sanitary towels were made from sheets and each girl was given six with their names on them. If they did not wash them well enough, the laundry worker called the girl out in front of everyone.¹¹⁵ Next they were provided with leather belts and thick pads, which they had to wash and re-use, drying them out under their mattresses.¹¹⁶ HIA 95 said that sanitary towels were put in a box to be washed.¹¹⁷ The re-use of pads was denied by the Order.¹¹⁸
- 62 Later, HIA 63 told us that the girls had to approach the nuns, and the sanitary towels were left under their pillows and limited to one for the day and one for night time, which was said to be never enough.¹¹⁹ HIA 61 said that the limited availability of sanitary towels, which were rationed by the nuns, meant that the girls smelt awful at school and other girls commented that they smelt foul.¹²⁰
- 63 The Sisters' failure to offer sex education was also criticised. HIA 30 said that the only sex education they got in the home was to marry a Catholic and keep the faith.¹²¹ Girls were given a copy of *My Dear Daughter* to read.¹²² HIA 63 said that the girls were told to say a prayer to Our Lady but were given no sex education at all, and anything they learned was from the older girls.¹²³ By contrast with the evidence of other witnesses, HIA 37 said that SR 116 used to talk to girls privately in her cell and go through *My Dear Daughter* with them.¹²⁴

113 SNB 674.

114 Day 97, pp.46-47.

115 SNB 760.

116 SNB 205-206.

117 Day 97, pp.46 to 47.

118 SNB 2043.

119 SNB 685, 875.

120 SNB 768.

121 SNB 760.

122 SNB 674.

123 SNB 685.

124 Day 107, pp.138 and 139.

64 To put these practices into context, it should be noted that in society in general sex was a taboo subject in the earlier decades; women, for example, were still churched in the days before the Second Vatican Council in 1962-5.¹²⁵ As Sr Brenda put it, sex was “shunned as a bad thing”.¹²⁶ It is understandable that the sisters were uncomfortable in dealing with it. Nonetheless, the Order had chosen to take on the task of caring for adolescent girls, and it was one of their responsibilities to prepare them for menarche, to deal with their physical needs sensitively, to explain to them what was happening and to help them to cope emotionally. The evidence demonstrates that the nuns clearly failed as far as the witnesses were concerned. When the staff was expanded to include lay workers, the girls’ keyworkers were said to have undertaken this task.

Clothes

- 65 Witnesses made relatively few comments about clothing. They spoke of their own clothes being removed on admission, and of being given old clothes in the 1950s and 1960s. The children all wore hand-me-downs but HIA 316 said that they were given a new skirt every six months, and they had two jumpers, which were changed once a fortnight.¹²⁷ HIA 28 said that the nuns also made pinafore dresses for the girls.¹²⁸ HIA 9 considered the clothing satisfactory, though SR 122, who did all the sewing, smacked girls’ heads if they ripped their aprons.¹²⁹
- 66 Footwear presented problems for some. In the 1950s, shoes were handed out by older girls and the younger ones were frightened to complain, so that at times they ended up with shoes which were too tight.¹³⁰ HIA 316 said that they were given shoes at the start of winter.
- 67 HIA 250, who was at Nazareth House throughout the 1960s, said that each child had her own toiletry bag with her own toothbrush and toothpaste, and she brought her bag to show the Panel.¹³¹

125 Churching was a ceremony in which a mother was blessed following the delivery of a baby; it included purification and a woman who had not been churched was considered unclean.

126 Day 119, p.17.

127 SNB 831-832.

128 SNB 043.

129 SNB 002.

130 SNB 181.

131 SNB 819, Day 100, p.23.

- 68 A concern for some witnesses was that they felt that they were distinguishable from the day pupils when at school. The Congregation made sure that the girls all had the necessary school uniforms when at secondary school off the premises. At St Monica's School, which was attended by the majority of the girls, they all wore the standard uniform, but HIA 327 said that the home girls still stood out because they had bowl haircuts.¹³²
- 69 In the later years, children were consulted and allowed to choose their own clothes within a budget.¹³³
- 70 Because the home had to rely on inadequate income in the earlier decades it is understandable that the Sisters had to rely on donations of clothing. Many people in the wider community would have passed on clothes from older children to younger ones, so that hand-me-downs were considered acceptable. The Order also augmented donations with clothing which was made in their workshop. The account of ill-fitting shoes described above was of course unacceptable. The main problem, however, is that if the Sisters had obtained per capita funding from the welfare authorities at an earlier stage the quality of clothing could have been significantly better, and children could have had more choice and individuality of style in the use of clothing grants.

Numbers and Names

- 71 HIA 32 was at Nazareth House in the 1930s and 1940s, when there were 160 girls in the home. They were "always called by a number", but on the odd occasion their names were used, which was how she found out she had two sisters in the home.¹³⁴ In the 1940s, HIA 439 said that the children were only known by numbers, not names, and if a nun wanted to speak to a child, she called out her number.¹³⁵ In the 1950s HIA 85 said that when she was called out to be publicly punished her number was used.¹³⁶
- 72 HIA 61 was at Nazareth House in the 1960s:
"We were all given numbers which the nuns would use to identify us, but at a later stage they started to use our surnames."¹³⁷

132 SNB 797.

133 SNB 1968.

134 SNB 234.

135 SNB 204, Day 93, pp.29 and 30.

136 SNB 268.

137 SNB 767.

HIA 161 said that in the 1960s surnames were used to call the girls, rather than first names.¹³⁸ HIA 171 said that in the late 1950s and 1960s their numbers were printed on their clothes, which was embarrassing outside the home. At school they were called by their numbers as well as their names, which annoyed her.¹³⁹

- 73 The Congregation denied that children were known by numbers and not by their names;¹⁴⁰ they have stated that there was no policy about the use of names and numbers, and there was no point at which it was decided to abandon the numbers. They saw this as a purely practical matter, to help with the organisation of clothing. From the evidence, we accept that numbers were used for a number of purposes in the earlier decades, but possibly only for laundry during the period covering the majority of the witnesses. In a large home such as Nazareth House, using such a system was certainly preferable to having a common pool of clothing. In so far as numbers continued to be used for other purposes, this would have been unacceptable.

Food

- 74 A number of witnesses commented on the poor quality of the food from the 1930s to the 1960s, presenting a fairly consistent picture throughout. HIA 32, for example, said that food in the 1930s and 1940s was not great and the girls were often hungry, with cocoa and a round of bread dipped in lard for breakfast, a potato and stewed onions for lunch, and lumpy porridge for tea. She said that they ate the slops from the nursing home, ate raw turnip skins and stole sweets and fruit. The washerwoman, NHB 35, caught her taking pears and apples for the other girls, and she said she was still scarred on her thigh from the nails in the plank with which NHB 35 hit her.¹⁴¹
- 75 One of the main targets for criticism was the meat - “usually bits of fat” according to HIA 361, “lumpy fatty stew” said HIA 387, and “sausages full of gristle” according to HIA 43.¹⁴² HIA 103 said “The stew was water with bits of grizzled fat in it”.¹⁴³ On one occasion, when the girls were due to go on holiday to Glenariff, they were served mutton stew which had gone

138 SNB 146.

139 SNB 780.

140 SNB 1968.

141 SNB 236.

142 SNB 713.

143 SNB 072.

off, but the nuns threatened that they would not go on holiday if it was not eaten. HIA 37 said that despite the smell and the consequent vomiting, the stew was eaten.¹⁴⁴

- 76 Other items which were mentioned included lumpy porridge, “black boiled eggs”, “pork pies that were just full of jelly and fat”,¹⁴⁵ tapioca and greasy fried bread. References to eggs give an indication of the diet provided. HIA 30 was at the home during the later 1940s and 1950s.

“My mother came from a farm and she used to send me up half a dozen eggs once a year or so. The nuns would single me out because of this and make sure I wasn’t getting any ideas above my station just because I was getting a fried egg and nobody else was.”¹⁴⁶

HIA 361, who was at Nazareth House in the 1940s when rationing was in force, said she did not see an egg till she was ten or eleven years old.¹⁴⁷

HIA 439 was used to “good country food”, but at Nazareth House it was only on Easter Sunday that they had a boiled egg.¹⁴⁸ HIA 316 said that on Christmas Day the girls were “so excited” because they had a fried egg.¹⁴⁹

- 77 The food provided was contrasted with what others had, and in particular the nuns. The Congregation insisted that the nuns had the same food as the children, and if anything they ate less well so that the children had enough.¹⁵⁰ HIA 63 worked in the kitchen, however, and said that while the children’s food ranged from acceptable to horrible, the nuns ate very well, having meat without fat and omelettes.¹⁵¹ HIA 223 said that when she worked in the kitchen she could not believe what the nuns had to eat: meat, potatoes, vegetables, trifles and cakes.¹⁵²
- 78 HIA 328 said that girls from the community attending school used to bring things which the home girls were not used to, and they had pocket money to spend in the tuckshop, which the home girls did not have. They never saw sweets, biscuits or crisps.¹⁵³

144 SNB 056-057.

145 SNB 794.

146 SNB 755.

147 SNB 371.

148 SNB 206.

149 SNB 829-830.

150 SNB 2127.

151 SNB 683.

152 SNB 316, Day 95, pp.112 to 114.

153 SNB 361.

- 79 Several witnesses mentioned that they were hungry, including HIA 387, HIA 166, and HIA 103. HIA 327 wrote:

“The food was terrible, but we were always hungry so we just had to eat it.”¹⁵⁴

The girls reacted in various ways. Bullies sent HIA 439 over the wall into the orchard to steal apples and pears, but she was caught and told off by Canon O’Neill.¹⁵⁵ HIA 52 said that once, during a nuns’ retreat, a girl got hold of the keys and they raided the pantry. The girls never had luxury items such as cakes, and she was not the only witness to have claimed that the girls resorted to eating grass because of their hunger.¹⁵⁶

- 80 Several witnesses commented on the nuns’ insistence that they ate the food provided:

“The nuns would walk up and down the tables and stand behind us, always watching to make sure we ate our meals.”¹⁵⁷

HIA 361 said that if food was not eaten, it reappeared at the next meal. If she tried to sneak it into the bin, the nun made her take it out and eat it, even if she was sick.¹⁵⁸ HIA 387, HIA 197 and HIA 439 also mentioned being made to stay at the table till food was eaten, or being forced to eat vomited food. HIA 298 was given a large lump of fat to eat and when she refused, a nun told her she could not leave the dining room until she had eaten it. A lay member of staff later took the plate from her and told her to go to bed.¹⁵⁹ HIA 124 said there was frequent force-feeding, with one nun pulling her hair back and holding her nose, while another put carrots in her mouth and held her chin till she swallowed them. HIA 124 believed that it was this force-feeding that caused her to develop anorexia later on.¹⁶⁰

- 81 Some witnesses were less critical. HIA 316 said she could not remember starving: “the food wasn’t great but it kept us alive.”¹⁶¹ Others criticised the diet as being bland and stodgy. It was only on feast days and at Christmas a bottle of HP sauce and a bowl of sugar would have been put on the table.¹⁶²

154 SNB 794.

155 SNB 206.

156 SNB 810.

157 SNB 794.

158 SNB 371.

159 SNB 701.

160 SNB 839.

161 SNB 829-830.

162 SNB 794.

- 82 By the mid-1970s the food seems to have improved. The girls ate in smaller dining rooms in the groups, and by this time the per capita allowances should have enabled the Sisters to spend more on the children's food. SR 153 was at Nazareth House from 1970 to 1973 and she said that by that time the sisters ate with their groups of children; they had the same food and plenty to eat.¹⁶³ HIA 257, who was at Nazareth House in the late 1960s and early 1970s, said the food was good, with fruit and crisps, and jam and bread for the children to fill up on.¹⁶⁴
- 83 In common with other aspects of the care provided by the Sisters, it seems clear that standards of food improved considerably over time. In the earlier decades, however, the volume of evidence provided by the witnesses indicates that the quality of the food provided fell below the acceptable. The number of complaints about the fatty stew suggests that butchers provided the home with the cheapest cuts of meat, which is unsurprising if the budget was tight and there were large numbers of girls to provide for. The rarity of eggs on the menu suggests a lack of variety in the menu. That the food was also insufficient is underlined by the stories of girls raiding the orchard and the pantry, and the number of complaints about hunger. If the Sisters had approached the welfare authorities for payments, some of these problems could have been avoided. We conclude that the standards of food at times fell below what should have been seen as the minimum in both quality and quantity. While the sisters' basic food may have been the same as the children's, we are not persuaded that they did not enjoy extras at times which were unavailable to the girls.
- 84 The Order denied that girls were force fed or that they were forced to eat unfinished meals.¹⁶⁵ However, seven of the witnesses reported undue pressure exerted on the girls by the nuns to eat food which they did not want to consume, though only one described being force-fed in detail. Most of these complaints related to individual girls, but on one occasion the whole group was threatened with the forfeiture of their holiday if they did not eat some rank mutton. The one instance of force-feeding is insufficient to be considered as systemic abuse, but we accept that the nuns did compel children to eat food, and this was very poor childcare practice, as the Sisters should have known at the time. It would not have persuaded the children to like or appreciate the food, but was perhaps

163 Day 112, p.71.

164 Day 100, p.83.

165 SNB 1967.

more a demonstration of authority, as the refusal of food can be seen in residential care as symbolic of rejection of the provider's parental role.

Activities

- 85 Witnesses did not comment much on the activities available during the evenings, weekends and holidays, but in general observations were positive. There were swings and climbing frames in the grounds, but HIA 328 felt they were only for show, so that people going past in buses would be impressed. She said that “there wasn't a toy or a book inside the convent”, other than the Bible and prayer books.¹⁶⁶ HIA 327 said that television was allowed once a week, on Saturdays. Even on cold days they had to stay out in the garden until the bell rang, and she remembered freezing.¹⁶⁷ Children's activities in the units were limited to watching television and doing chores.¹⁶⁸
- 86 HIA 257 was at Nazareth House till the mid-1970s, and by then the range of activities had expanded to include skipping, Irish dancing, violin and accordion classes, choir, ballet, elocution, swimming, cinema, walks with picnics, trips to museums or the beach.

“There were always activities ongoing and the nuns supported us and encouraged us in whatever we were good at”.¹⁶⁹

Witnesses also mentioned drama lessons, scouts, girl guides and the availability of second-hand bikes to take trips.¹⁷⁰ Nor was it just a question of the range of activities:

“As we got older we were granted a lot more freedom. The older girls could go out to dances and were given a key to get back into the house”.¹⁷¹

- 87 A woman taught Irish dancing, and the children won lots of medals and cups.¹⁷² HIA 39 found the dancing “an escape from the routine of the home”, which she really enjoyed as the costumes were beautiful and they won cups and medals.¹⁷³ HIA 257 said that she herself was a champion

166 SNB 361.
167 SNB 793.
168 SNB 732
169 SNB 340.
170 SNB 824.
171 SNB 340.
172 SNB 831.
173 SNB 245.

Irish dancer, competitive in everything and encouraged to be the best.¹⁷⁴ HIA 103 was given the opportunity to learn the violin, taught by a music teacher from outside which she enjoyed.¹⁷⁵

- 88 In the summer time all the children went on black taxi trips to Tyrella beach, with six or eight children to a taxi, which they enjoyed.¹⁷⁶ On one occasion in the 1940s the US Navy took the children to see a submarine.¹⁷⁷
- 89 It appears from the evidence that in the earlier decades the girls were left to their own devices when playing outside, but that there was a range of occasional organised activities in which good use was made of volunteers, such as the Irish dancing classes and the summertime taxi trips to the seaside. From the mid-1970s a wider range of activities seems to have become available, perhaps in part because of the increases in staffing.

Birthdays

- 90 HIA 361 who was at Nazareth House in the 1940s and HIA 327 who was there in the 1960s both said that birthdays were never celebrated.¹⁷⁸ HIA 223 was born on Christmas Day, and she learnt that it was her birthday in 1958 when she was ten, when she was selected to put baby Jesus in the crib on the grounds that it was her birthday.¹⁷⁹
- 91 The Congregation say that birthdays were celebrated, but this could have been from the 1970s onwards. Birthday celebrations are one of the most obvious ways of giving individual attention to children and their introduction would have been a significant (if delayed) milestone in the change from institutional to individual styles of care in the home.

Christmas

- 92 The girls were invited to parties, for example at Mackies' factory, but if they were given presents, witnesses said they were removed as soon as the girls returned to the home and they did not see them again.¹⁸⁰ Any sweets they were given were also taken from them on their return.¹⁸¹ HIA 327 disliked Christmas parties as they made her feel like a charity case.

174 Day 100, p.84.
175 SNB 073.
176 SNB 185.
177 SNB 756.
178 SNB 796, 375.
179 SNB 319.
180 SNB 320.
181 SNB 756.

She saw her brothers at parties, but did not know they were her brothers and only got to know them on leaving care.¹⁸²

- 93 Bishop Street Ceilidh Band from the Derry Nazareth House visited and put on a show.¹⁸³ HIA 55 said that being taken to the Christmas pantomime was her only good memory of Nazareth House.¹⁸⁴ HIA 28 said that shows were put on at Christmas, which was:

“... the only time the nuns were good to you and you got a decent dinner. We might have got a pair of slippers in a Christmas box and maybe an apple and an orange. We thought that was brilliant; it was such a treat.”¹⁸⁵

- 94 HIA 55 was given a game called Smugglers, but it was taken off her the next day.¹⁸⁶ HIA 361 was given an orange and two sweets for Christmas; she wanted to savour the orange and kept it, but it went mouldy.¹⁸⁷ HIA 14 said that NHB 102, the handyman, dressed up as Santa Claus and handed out second-hand items which people had donated; she received an umbrella with holes in it.¹⁸⁸ They had to scrub the home if visitors were expected, smile and tell them everything was great.¹⁸⁹
- 95 Christmas was clearly special to some of the children, but it also seems to have been a time of disappointment. It is hard to see why the Sisters would have removed toys and sweets from the girls, but in addition to the witnesses who were in Nazareth House it appears to have been a pattern in evidence from other homes run by the Order.

Education

- 96 The primary school was on site, and the nuns who taught the girls were also those who looked after them in their groups, which confused HIA 197. HIA 327 said there was no escape from SR 31, who ran their group before and after school and taught them as well, but she was not as harsh at school, in the presence of pupils from outside.¹⁹⁰ In the primary school there was a system for girls to have partners and they were responsible

182 SNB 795-796.

183 SNB 003.

184 SNB 195.

185 SNB 046.

186 Day 103, p.45.

187 SNB 375.

188 SNB 120.

189 SNB 046.

190 SNB 793.

for each others' clothes, shoes and hair, for example darning each others' socks.¹⁹¹

- 97 A number of witnesses were critical of the quality of education provided. According to HIA 166:

“The education was very basic, there was no such thing as special attention, and rather those with difficulties were ignored or made an example of”.¹⁹²

It was said that in the class for backward children they spent their days in two groups divided by age, drawing, knitting or in silence.

- 98 Several witnesses spoke of being emotionally abused by being humiliated in class. HIA 32 hated her teacher, SR 112, because she was English:

“[SR 112] made me spend a lot of time in the corner with a sheet of paper pinned to my back with either ‘dunce’ or ‘thief’ written on.”

When SR 112 refused to let her go to the toilet she wet herself and SR 112 humiliated her by making her walk through all the classrooms to get a mop and bucket.¹⁹³ HIA 197 said that SR 134 mocked her in front of the whole class, undermining her self-confidence, and she put her academic underachievement down to fear, rather than stupidity. HIA 52 said she was called a dunce and made to stand in the corner with hands on head:

“You were always put down and told you were good for nothing”.¹⁹⁴

- 99 HIA 361 wrote:

“They didn’t teach us anything other than religion. It was religion, morning, noon and night. There was constant praying. We had to pray when we woke up, before meals, after meals, at the start of school, and before we went to bed. When I later went to school in England, I couldn’t believe how much I knew about religion. My hand was always up, but it was the only subject I knew. I could barely read and I couldn’t count. I could write but I wasn’t good at it. I couldn’t tell the time”.¹⁹⁵

- 100 HIA 85 said that clever girls were picked out and sent to night school, but the nuns did not bother with the rest.¹⁹⁶ HIA 197 also noted that the nuns

191 SNB 372.

192 SNB 290.

193 SNB 235.

194 SNB 810.

195 SNB 372-3.

196 SNB 264.

took an interest in clever girls who were succeeding.¹⁹⁷ There appears to have been a selection process, with a small number of clever girls passing the 11-plus, the majority moving on to St Monica's secondary school and a few being transferred to a special school. HIA 14 found the education in general good and she passed the 11-plus.¹⁹⁸

101 HIA 20 said she was labelled backward, and was sent to Immaculata School for the educationally subnormal after half term at St Monica's.¹⁹⁹ In oral evidence she said that the labelling had been damaging and had had a life-long impact, but later in life she nonetheless qualified as a nurse and wrote a book about her experiences.²⁰⁰

102 HIA 117 said that she was withdrawn from the 11-plus examination as she had a fit of nervous giggling. However, she added that all the girls, including herself, were sent to St Monica's Secondary School anyway.²⁰¹ HIA 63 said that SR 31 stopped her taking the 11-plus and kept her back.

“The nuns never encouraged education. I believe if I had stayed in school longer and got some qualifications it would have been better for my career”.²⁰²

It is possible that the withdrawal from the 11+ was due to a misunderstanding about HIA 63's age. HIA 195 felt she had the capability to do well academically, but SR 31 sent her to Oakwood special needs school, where she had a difficult time, being attacked by Protestant children.²⁰³

103 HIA 52 said that the girls were slapped, strapped and caned at St Monica's. After she had thrown a snowball at the head's house, HIA 52 was put on the stage, told she was the worst girl in the school and expelled, for which SR 116 gave her a hiding.²⁰⁴ In oral evidence she said that girls from Nazareth House stood out at St Monica's both because of their clothes and because they did not know how to interact with other people.²⁰⁵

197 Day 95, p.15.

198 SNB 120.

199 SNB 184-185.

200 Day 107, pp.34-37, 53-54, 165-166.

201 SNB 875.

202 SNB 684.

203 SNB 175.

204 SNB 813.

205 Day 97, p.85.

104 The combined roles of teacher and head of a residential group in the home will have meant a very long working day for the sisters involved. They will have had very little time for leisure or the preparation of teaching materials. It is not surprising, therefore, that the picture painted by witnesses is of lack of stimulation and a punitive approach to discipline. While the quality of the education provided in the school is not a matter for this Inquiry the girls' experience of school is relevant because the school was in the same premises as the home, nuns worked in the home and the school and their approach to discipline and administration of punishment was similar in both settings. It could have been anticipated that many of the girls who were admitted to Nazareth House were under functioning educationally because of poor stimulation at home and unhappy early experiences of schooling. It was for the Sisters to compensate for these drawbacks by assessing the individual girls' needs and encouraging them and helping them to catch up through homework and study and achieve their potential. The evidence suggests that they fell short of these aims.

Family Contact

- 105 Some witnesses felt that in the earlier decades the Sisters deliberately kept siblings apart, but the Congregation denied this. There is evidence that siblings were introduced to each other, but this appears to have been occasional and insufficient to maintain family bonds. The instances recalled by witnesses indicate that such contacts were unusual, but all except one example relate to the period before the home admitted boys, which permitted families to remain together.
- 106 HIA 361 was at Nazareth Lodge in the 1940s; she never met her sister and did not know she had sisters and brothers; retrospectively she felt that they had been deliberately kept apart.²⁰⁶
- 107 HIA 28 and HIA 39 were two of three sisters who were together in Our Lady's group in the 1960s. HIA 39 was playing leapfrog in the playground one day in the yard with her two sisters, when SR 31 took them to the railings which separated the nursery from the girls' groups and introduced them to their youngest sister, who was in the nursery section. They rarely saw her after that until they left the home.²⁰⁷ Previously they had not known that they had a sister in the nursery.²⁰⁸

206 SNB 376.

207 SNB 245.

208 SNB 043.

- 108 Once or twice a year the nuns arranged visits between Nazareth Lodge and Nazareth House, and in the 1950s HIA 95 was taken once to Nazareth Lodge where she managed to meet one of her brothers.²⁰⁹ It was also on an organised visit that HIA 37 met her brother in the 1960s; she also met him once by chance at a pantomime.²¹⁰
- 109 HIA 124 was at Nazareth House twice in the late 1960s and she alleged that her parents did not allow her to see her sister in hospital when she contracted leukaemia, and when her sister died HIA 124 was not permitted to attend the funeral.²¹¹ The Order commented that they could not understand how this happened.²¹²
- 110 Parents were able to visit when they chose, but usually called on the home at weekends. HIA 103 said that her father was never made to feel welcome by the nuns; he passed HIA 103 a bag of oranges over the wall and the sisters always asked for money when he visited.²¹³ HIA 103 said that he gave her an envelope each week to pass to the nuns.²¹⁴

Confiscation of Possessions

- 111 We have already noted that on admission children were issued with clothing by the home and their own which they wore on arrival was removed. Mention was also made of toys given to children at Christmas being removed. The evidence of witnesses suggests that these were only two examples of a much more widespread practice whereby clothes, toys, presents, fruit and money were taken from children by nuns. Sometimes they were passed to other children; often they were never seen again by the witnesses.
- 112 Every Christmas HIA 161's mother sent a tea-chest full of dolls, clothes and selection boxes. It was the one time in the year that she and her sisters were called together, to see the contents, so that her elder sister could write to their mother to say that they had seen everything and to thank her. HIA 161 said that the nuns then took the dolls from them and said that the contents were going to a better cause.²¹⁵ The Order accepts that toys and presents might have been tidied up and put away, but not that they were maliciously taken from the children.²¹⁶

209 SNB 665.

210 SNB 055.

211 SNB 840, 61457.

212 SNB 2093.

213 SNB 70-71.

214 Day 99, p.184.

215 SNB 148, Day 98, p.27.

216 SNB 2019.

- 113 HIA 375 said that her parents brought little presents and they were told to put them in their lockers, but the presents disappeared and HIA 375 said she would have known if other children had taken them.²¹⁷ HIA 103 gave examples of personal items which she alleged were taken by the nuns and disappeared - a yellow jumper bought for her by her father, a lambswool dress, and a doll called Rosebud which was given to her at a Christmas party. She believed that these items had been sold.²¹⁸ HIA 134 was financially supported by her stepfather, who sent her dolls and dresses, which she said she never received.²¹⁹
- 114 HIA 95 said that when her father brought her sweets, the nuns took them.²²⁰ HIA 327 said that dolls appeared when there were due to be visitors, and disappeared afterwards.
- “If a child came into the home with a toy, it was taken off them. The nuns seemed to enjoy being cruel”.²²¹
- HIA 368 said that clothes bought for him and his sister by their social worker were also removed by the nuns as soon as they returned to Nazareth House and were never seen again. There is a record of the purchase of the clothes.²²² His sister tried to tell the social worker, but there is no record of a complaint being made.²²³ HIA 14 stayed with her aunt and uncle in the holidays. The nuns took any presents she took back with her to the home, together with any clothes which her aunt had made - “We had nothing we could call our own”.²²⁴
- 115 HIA 175 went to a football match with her sister, who entered her name in a competition, and a man arrived at the home with her prize, a football signed by the Down team, He presented it to her but she never saw it again.²²⁵ A slide was donated to the home, as recorded in a photograph which includes the benefactor, but it was never seen again.²²⁶ In oral evidence HIA 43 mentioned a newspaper cutting which alleged that the Order was selling clothing and toys at jamborees. She believed that her

217 SNB 734.

218 SNB 073.

219 SNB 866.

220 SNB 664.

221 SNB 796.

222 SNB 6446.

223 SNB 656-657.

224 SNB 120.

225 SNB 165.

226 SNB 716, 61969.

hair had also been cut and sold.²²⁷ On the day of her First Communion HIA 124 and her sister were given money by a neighbour; they were going to spend it on something for the girls, but the nuns took it from them.²²⁸ The Order stated that this was to keep the money safe.²²⁹

- 116 The Order was no doubt hard pressed to find sufficient funding, but some of these confiscations were of items of little value, that would not have produced significant income if sold. A possible justification could have been that children who did not receive presents might have felt deprived on seeing other children with new clothes or toys, but if so, it was for the Sisters to give them clothes or toys to compensate, not to deprive the fortunate children, making them all equally deprived. Indeed, the situation offered an opportunity for the nuns to indicate their concern for the more deprived children and so create closer relationships with them.
- 117 The approach adopted proved to be cruel and negative. Personal possessions are important to children in defining their individuality; the 1952 Home Office Guidance spoke of children's treasured possessions needing to be treated with respect.²³⁰ Confiscating possessions as described by the witnesses was a depersonalising institutional process. It was also emotionally abusive, as children lost precious items which reminded them of home links, such as the yellow teddy-bear jumper which HIA 43 was given by her father, and which disappeared - "the only reminder I had that somebody cared for me", as she put it in evidence.²³¹ Today such confiscation would be considered theft. **There was no valid childcare justification for confiscating the children's personal possessions, and this constituted systemic abuse.**

Foster Care

- 118 Every Sunday people from outside used to walk round the garden and identify children they wished to consider for a foster placement. Any child who was identified had to wash their face and go to the parlour to discuss the possible placement. HIA 62 irritated SR 134 because she wished to remain in the home and be with her sisters, and did not want to be picked.²³²

227 SNB 32995.

228 SNB 840.

229 SNB 2093.

230 HIA 472.

231 SNB 712, Day 96, pp.143-145.

232 SNB 674-675.

119 HIA 270 wrote:

“On most Sundays we were dressed up and lined up for people to come look and take us out for the day if they chose us. I was chosen once... We were taken to a caravan and we were playing ball and I burned myself so the young couple panicked and we ended up in Casualty, I didn't seem to get taken out after that.”

Fortunately for HIA 270, she formed a strong relationship with a member of staff whose brother and sister-in-law fostered her, and this became a long-term supportive relationship. HIA 270 was of mixed race, and a nun advised her foster-mother to pick a nice blond-haired blue-eyed child instead, but she refused firmly.²³³

120 HIA 124 went to stay for weekends with a policeman and his family, but when she returned, any presents such as sweets or a teddy were taken from her.²³⁴ The girls were also sent to stay with families during the holidays. HIA 95 said that she was sent to a family with a newborn baby and she was supposed to help look after it. However the father of the family “tried it on” with HIA 95 during the night, and when HIA 95 resisted he drove her back to Nazareth House, saying that she was not doing the job she was sent to do.²³⁵

121 The idea of parading children for selection by potential foster parents would now be considered institutional and abhorrent, but the system appears to have resulted in successful placements according to witnesses in other homes, and it was commendable that the Sisters attempted to give children an experience of family life, with the possibility of long-term fostering and adoption.

Work Experience, Discharge and Aftercare

122 A number of girls were sent to Australia from Nazareth House under the child migrant scheme. Their evidence is dealt with in Chapter 6.

123 For children who stayed at Nazareth House till school leaving age, the Sisters found accommodation and employment. It appears that there was little preparation for discharge, and girls were not consulted about what they wanted to do. The jobs to which they were allocated were often poorly paid and menial. In the later years, there was independence training and aftercare practice was improved.

233 SNB 347.

234 SNB 838.

235 SNB 664-665.

- 124 HIA 439 was sent to work at St John of God Hospital in Newry, but she walked out the next day and contacted Fr Jeffrey who got her a job working with Rev and Mrs Cupples. She said they were brilliant, as this was her first experience of real family life, and the placement was an interesting example of interdenominational co-operation, as they were Presbyterians.²³⁶
- 125 HIA 328 left Nazareth House in 1970. The nuns told her “out of the blue” that she was going and gave her a suitcase and a set of clothes. She was not allowed to say goodbye to her younger sisters, and she was taken home to her mother’s house.
- “Everything was strange. It was awful. I didn’t know how to get a bus or ask for anything in a shop. They didn’t prepare us for the outside world at all.”²³⁷
- She felt that after leaving, girls were not welcome to return.²³⁸
- 126 HIA 171 was exploited by her first employer who gave her £4 for three months’ work, cleaning and baby-minding for long hours.²³⁹ HIA 20 was told to collect a suitcase and take it to the parlour, where she met a lady who took her to a family where she was expected to act as skivvy. She was not prepared for the outside world and no one visited to check how she was getting on.²⁴⁰
- 127 When no outside employment or accommodation could be arranged, girls sometimes stayed on at Nazareth House. When HIA 316 left school she was told that she was to work in the old people’s home at Nazareth House. This entailed laying out dead bodies, which petrified her.²⁴¹ The Congregation denied that at the age of fifteen HIA 316 would have been required to lay out dead bodies.²⁴²
- 128 HIA 52 also worked for the nuns in the old people’s home and in the kitchen from the age of fifteen to eighteen, and she said that she was not paid.²⁴³ The Order stated that HIA 52 would have been paid, but that money would have been deducted for her keep.²⁴⁴ HIA 9 obtained a job

236 SNB 208.

237 SNB 365.

238 SNB 363.

239 SNB 786.

240 SNB 187.

241 SNB 833.

242 SNB 2144.

243 SNB 814.

244 SNB 2140.

stitching clothes when she left school at fifteen, but she also alleged that SR 31 took all her wages to pay for her keep at Nazareth House.²⁴⁵

- 129 HIA 62 complained that the preparation for her discharge was inadequate, especially in view of her upbringing in an insular environment. She left Nazareth House in 1974 during the Troubles, following an incident in which she and two others went to a disco without permission; she was placed by her social worker in a Protestant hostel, which put her at some risk.²⁴⁶

Religion

- 130 Religious observance was taken seriously. A chaplain was nominated by the bishop, but paid a weekly stipend of £5 by the Sisters. He said Mass every morning and Rosary and Benediction several days a week, he heard the girls' confessions monthly, and he prepared them for First Communion and Confirmation, though these services were held in the parish church.²⁴⁷ First Communion and Confirmation were seen as special days, and HIA 335 said that in the 1940s the girls wore white and were allowed to ride on trams. People gave them sweets and pennies.²⁴⁸
- 131 HIA 316 said that the girls attended Mass every morning, and said Rosary and Benedictions throughout the day.²⁴⁹ In the 1960s the three groups took turns to attend Mass.²⁵⁰ It appears that in the 1970s there was a degree of choice and some girls chose not to attend, but they were exceptional and risked being labelled pagans by SR 31.
- 132 Misbehaviour in the chapel was treated as a serious misdemeanour. For example, when bullies pressured HIA 439 into making a joke confession, NHB 34 slapped her and took her into the chapel to kneel at the altar rail. Benediction was being held, and she said that the nuns shook their fists at her.²⁵¹ One priest slapped girls' faces if they did not say amen in a loud voice, according to HIA 161 and children who did not know their catechism were caned or whipped²⁵² or "whacked over the ear or hit across the hands with an implement".²⁵³ SR 116 grabbed girls by the hair if not kneeling upright when praying. HIA 28 said that they had to kneel

245 SNB 005.

246 SNB 678.

247 SNB 80076-80077.

248 SNB 025.

249 SNB 829.

250 SNB 010.

251 SNB 207.

252 SNB 146.

253 SNB 025.

on the sitting room floor in their bare legs for half-an-hour prayers in the evening.²⁵⁴ When she was about to make her Holy Communion, the nuns discovered that HIA 161 had not been baptised, and she said she was punched, kicked and put in another room away from everybody because she was deemed a pagan.²⁵⁵

- 133 There were occasional retreats, during which the children were not allowed to speak for three days, and they filled their time with reading or knitting. When caught talking, HIA 28 said, she was beaten on the hands and made to kneel and pray for three hours.²⁵⁶
- 134 Since the old people's home was part of the premises, HIA 328 saw dead bodies in a room near the chapel which she found "quite disturbing". She said that the girls were lined up on one occasion to kiss a dead nun, and as she was too small to reach she had to be lifted up.²⁵⁷ About 1961 a girl making her way back from a foster home got lost in the snow and died. HIA 20 saw her in her coffin and thought she was asleep.²⁵⁸
- 135 HIA 234's conclusion was that:

"Religion was drilled into us. I was on my knees all the time".²⁵⁹

HIA 234 was, however, the only witness to offer this criticism. In our opinion the level of observance was consistent with what might reasonably have been expected at that time in a home run by a Catholic Order.

Records and Care Planning

- 136 It seems likely that in the earlier decades records were rudimentary, and former residents seeking information have sometimes obtained little beyond their dates of birth, baptism and confirmation, admission and discharge, together with notes of any contact maintained after their discharge. When in 1964 at the age of eleven HIA 250 wanted to know more about her parentage, SR 31 gave her the details of her background.²⁶⁰ Although there is no record that documentation has been destroyed, it seems likely that with the closure of the home, and in the absence of premises to store such material, most of it no longer exists.²⁶¹

254 SNB 044.

255 SNB 146.

256 SNB 044.

257 SNB 359.

258 SNB 184.

259 SNB 330.

260 SNB 823.

261 SNB 1970.

- 137 By the mid-1970s more attention was being paid to the planning of the care and education of individual girls. HIA 257, for example, was assessed by a psychologist because of her temper tantrums, and she was shown considerable tolerance at school so that she did not have to be transferred elsewhere.²⁶² HIA 195 said that SR 31 sat in when they met social workers - “We weren’t allowed to tell them anything”.²⁶³

Staffing

- 138 The community in Nazareth House Belfast was made up of a group of sisters whose responsibilities were allocated annually.²⁶⁴ Some were fund-raisers and travelled round the community to obtain money. Some were responsible for specific practical duties such as cooking or overseeing the laundry or chapel. There was also often a small number of retired nuns. For the early decades there was one sister per group of girls, about four in all, who were accountable to the Mother Superior. The Order accepted that these staffing levels were inadequate.²⁶⁵ As noted in the section above on education, some of the sisters also acted as teachers, though this practice ceased in the later years. The nursery had a separate team of a sister and some helpers. In the early years before paid lay staff were appointed, the staff who were not sisters were “mostly old girls who had been out in service and could not settle, or had not the ability to survive outside”, and they helped in the kitchen and laundry.²⁶⁶
- 139 It was probably in the late 1950s or 1960s that the sisters were first augmented by the appointment of lay staff who were often young single women, only a little older than the teenage girls whom they were supervising. The appointments were made by the Sister Superior.²⁶⁷
- 140 From the 1970s onwards, staffing levels improved and the size of the groups was reduced, so that the ratio of staff to children was more generous. Along with improvements in staffing levels, training for staff was improved. They were seconded on qualifying courses, and by the time that the home closed, a high proportion were qualified.

262 SNB 341,342.

263 SNB 175.

264 SNB 10399-10468.

265 SNB 1965.

266 SNB 16198.

267 SNB 1964.

Childcare

141 In this section we shall draw together our overall conclusions about the quality of residential childcare provided at Nazareth House, based on the evidence in the sections above on different aspects of daily living.

142 A number of witnesses were highly critical of the overall quality of childcare that they experienced HIA 55 said that the nuns were “physically and emotionally cruel” to the girls, and showed “no warmth or affection”.²⁶⁸ This was echoed by HIA 361 who said:

“They never taught us anything positive. They just criticised us over everything. There was no affection or praise.”²⁶⁹

143 A number of witnesses said that it was not simply a question of the nuns displaying a lack of affection, but that they discouraged girls forming relationships with friends or family members. HIA 37 said that “The nuns never showed any compassion or nurturing”, but went on to state “They even discouraged affection between families”.²⁷⁰ HIA 27 said:

“We had no real opportunity to make friends in the home as the nuns did not like us talking to each other”.²⁷¹

HIA 361 wrote:

“I was always a loner. ...I used to stand in the corner. I didn’t want anyone to notice me, particularly the nuns. ...I knew that if the nuns paid no attention to me, I wouldn’t get slapped”.²⁷²

144 It should be noted that three of the four witnesses quoted above were in the home in the 1940s and one in the 1950s. During the lifetime of Nazareth House standards of childcare improved greatly. Staffing levels were increased. Staff training was introduced. Physical conditions were better. The size of groups was reduced, together with the overall number of children. Boys were admitted, so that siblings could stay together. Recording, care planning and the involvement of children in decision-making were all introduced. These changes were not all made at once, but in the final years the quality of childcare was acceptable, and the only serious criticism was that the children were still housed in a large old institution.

268 SNB 194.

269 SNB 374-375.

270 SNB 058.

271 SNB 124.

272 SNB 372.

- 145 During the latter years there were fewer grounds for complaint, therefore, and this is reflected in the lower number of witnesses who were in the home then. The majority of the witnesses were in the home in the late 1940s, 1950s, 1960s and early 1970s, and our observations on childcare essentially relate to those decades. Those who were in the home before the Second World War or early 1940s gave similar evidence and made similar complaints, but they are fewer in number.
- 146 Residential childcare is difficult and demanding, especially if the children have suffered disturbed backgrounds and have to come to terms with unhappy and damaging experiences. Success requires a united staff team with shared values and aims. In this respect the community will have been a great support to the sisters responsible for the groups in Nazareth House, in helping them maintain their motivation in the face of very limited resources and unremittingly long hours of work, year in year out. The beliefs which they held in common and the vows which they had all made will have sustained them in their lifetime commitment to be of service.
- 147 It is possible, however, that some of the problems encountered in the evidence reflected the other side of the same coin. The Order was highly hierarchical; sisters were expected to be obedient, and would not have readily challenged the existing way of doing things. Indeed, they were directed to work where the Order required them. Until training was introduced they were not exposed to new ideas in childcare, and they therefore maintained - and did not challenge - methods which were decades out of date. Even in the later years the split between the sisters in charge of the groups and the lay staff whom they managed introduced a sort of class system which some lay staff resented and which detracted from teamwork.
- 148 For adults who voluntarily submitted themselves to be members of the Congregation, obedience will have reflected their life-long commitment, but if it was then expected of disturbed adolescents, there was a real risk of confrontations.²⁷³ The main response of the sisters to any girl who was bold or cheeky appears to have been punishment, usually physical, but often involving humiliation. To help such children overcome their difficulties a much more tolerant and understanding approach was required, involving much more individual attention and discussion of the issues in question.

273 SNB 48751.

- 149 The sisters had given up much in becoming postulants, novices and then full members of the Order. They presumably had very few private possessions. Their lifestyle was modest – despite the allegations by some witnesses that they had better food than the children. Their contacts with their own families were severely limited. It is possible, then, that they did not appreciate how significant some possessions were to children or that they thought that children should not become attached to material possessions. Whatever the thinking, it is clear from the evidence that many witnesses bitterly resented having to give up clothes, toys or teddies on admission or after visits to their families or foster carers. While the sisters may voluntarily have chosen self-abnegation, the children had made no such choice.
- 150 A number of the witnesses observed that the nuns did not want them to make friends, sometimes separating girls who had formed friendships or warning other girls not to associate with them. Similarly, some witnesses had the impression that the nuns wished to split families. Although the Sisters say that they had no policy to break up families, there were few attempts to help siblings to maintain contact in the earlier decades, and the absence of frequent contacts often created life-long rifts. This was in the context of the Northern Ireland community, where family and extended family links were of great importance. The reasons for taking such a negative approach to family links, which was contrary to childcare thinking at the time, are hard to fathom, but the sisters themselves were expected to avoid developing close relationships which might harm the general wellbeing of their community, and it is possible that they applied this concept to the children.
- 151 The Sisters appear also to have feared that parents whom they saw as immoral or feckless would influence their daughters, and that the unacceptable characteristics of the parents would be replicated by the children. This is understandable, but the use of severe punishments or humiliation will not have been effective in countering the problem. HIA 161, for example, was in St Anne's group with SR 116, who, she said, beat her the most.
- “We came from bad people, bad homes, we were the scum of the earth, children of drunks and prostitutes and goodness knows what, and so we had our parents' sins to answer for, and that had to be beaten out of us”.²⁷⁴

274 SNB 150.

The children needed to be loved and offered a more attractive way of living.

- 152 Sex education must have presented particular problems for the sisters. The childcare task at Nazareth House was to help adolescent girls learn how to relate to the opposite sex with a view to the roles they might fulfil as partners and parents. Having usually been members of the Order all their adult lives and taken a vow of chastity, the nuns presumably found their own life experience of limited help in this respect. Moreover, they appear to have equated sex with sin, and anything connected with sex was seen as abhorrent. This was apparent in the lack of preparation of girls for menarche; they were generally given the booklet *My Dear Daughter* to read and it was left to older girls to explain about periods. The system for handling menstruation was also punitive.
- 153 As noted above, the quality of childcare changed overtime. Systems became more flexible. The introduction of lay staff brought new perspectives on preparing girls for adulthood. Perhaps most importantly, the increases in staffing levels meant that children could have greater individual attention, and there would have been time for things to be discussed.
- 154 We have already concluded that the treatment of bedwetting, poor home nursing and the confiscation of the children's possessions were all systemically abusive. **However, during the earlier decades, the combination of aspects of childcare (such as excessive chores, an institutional approach to bathing, the use of Jeyes fluid, the handling of menstruation and sex education, the poor quality of food, the insistence on eating unwanted food, the failure to celebrate birthdays, the poor quality of education at the school on the premises and the failure to prepare children for discharge) which were all below the standard of childcare that might reasonably have been expected at that time, we consider that this amounted to systemic abuse.**

Allegations of Abuse

Physical Abuse by Staff

- 155 Over the years covered by the Inquiry, allegations of physical abuse were made against a number of nuns and lay staff. However, the bulk of the allegations relate to four sisters, SR 189, SR 31, SR 134 and SR 116. SR 189 was Principal of the school in the 1950s. The three last named

were each responsible for one of the three groups of girls and their time at Nazareth House overlapped for most of the 1960s. The three were all firm disciplinarians, and shared a common approach to childcare, such that they dominated the atmosphere in the home at that time. During the overlap there were typically over 20 girls at any one time in Nazareth House who have approached this Inquiry as witnesses. It is unlikely that there were more than forty girls in residence during this decade, and so the applicants will have formed an unusually high proportion of the total number of residents. Once the four sisters had left, in 1970, only two children were admitted in the following fourteen years who have made allegations of abuse to the Inquiry. The four sisters are considered individually below, following examples of evidence of physical abuse relating to other staff.

156 In the 1940s, HIA 439 considered the Mother Superior, SR 112, “very bad to us”, as “she battered us stupid”, using her cane, which she kept hanging from her belt, and hitting HIA 439 on her feet.²⁷⁵ If girls refused communion, they were caned, and if they pulled their hands away when being caned, they were hit on their legs.²⁷⁶ HIA 335 also said that SR 112 and SR 177 used a belt, a thick leather strap or a ruler to beat her.²⁷⁷

157 In the 1950s some of the punishments were inflicted formally in the presence of all the girls. HIA 95 said that NHB 42:

“... was paralysed down one side and the nuns brought her up to the stage in the big hall, bent her over and beat her on her bare backside in front of one hundred girls. She couldn't even fight back.”²⁷⁸

HIA 20 recalled a similar occasion when three girls were taken up onto the stage and were smacked on their bare bottoms in front of the rest of the girls,²⁷⁹ and HIA 37 recalled this incident, saying that:

“...the nun went at them and whipped them with a cane over and over. They did this in front of everybody else and listening to the screams of the girls was terrible.”²⁸⁰

On another occasion NHB 51, was caned in public and HIA 37 said that she “counted each slap and I remember stopping at 100 because it was

275 SNB 204.

276 Day 93, pp.7-9.

277 SNB 024.

278 SNB 662.

279 SNB 183.

280 SNB 061.

so distressing.”²⁸¹ HIA 85 explained from personal experience how she was told to lie down on the stage, with one nun holding both her legs in the air, whilst another nun hit her repeatedly across the bottom with a stick, a hairbrush or whatever implement they could get their hands on. She said it happened to her once and she saw it happen to other girls on numerous occasions. She considered it degrading.²⁸²

- 158 The Congregation pointed out that corporal punishment was widely used in families, schools and homes²⁸³ but conceded that:

“...with regret, the Sisters believe that the policy of ‘no physical punishment’ may not have been adhered to.”²⁸⁴

Such punishments were contrary to good childcare practice, the Order’s policies and the statutory 1952 Regulations for voluntary homes. Regulation 11(3) explicitly stated that caning should not exceed six strokes, that no caning should be administered in the presence of another child, and that children with known physical or mental disabilities should not be subject to corporal punishment without the sanction of the medical officer.²⁸⁵ In the absence of records it is not possible to determine whether the last requirement was met or whether the punishments were recorded as required. **These formal corporal punishments constituted systemic abuse.**

- 159 Other physical punishments in the 1950s were informal. HIA 30 said the last beating which she received was from SR 190 when she was aged 15:

“Her eyes were blazing with rage and she lunged at me”.²⁸⁶

HIA 166 was hit for dropping the nuns’ wimples in the mud. SR 145 said she was a child of the devil and battered her with a stick in the workroom.²⁸⁷ HIA 387 summarised the maltreatment she experienced: being “slapped around the head and the back of the neck”, “hit ... on both sides of our hands with a ruler, until our hands bled”, “punched most days for something or other”, picked up “by the ears”, and “hit with leather belts.”²⁸⁸ HIA 234 said that when she was seven or eight years old, while

281 SNB 061.

282 SNB 268.

283 SNB 2024.

284 SNB 2116.

285 HIA 290.

286 SNB 758.

287 SNB 294-295.

288 SNB 386.

on the way to the bathroom, SR 183 pulled her out of line, threw her onto the stairs, pulled up her petticoat and hit her hard in the stomach repeatedly with her fist. She found this upsetting as she said she had no idea why the nun did this.²⁸⁹

160 Further allegations of informal physical punishments were made by witnesses who were at the home in the 1960s. One of HIA 62's earliest memories was that when she was aged three or four she was knocked out by SR 180 by banging her head on a radiator for looking at the contents of her handkerchief after sneezing; she woke up in the isolation room.²⁹⁰ This is one of the few allegations relating to the nursery.

161 HIA 62 also said she witnessed girls being assaulted, the worst being when her sister had her head banged against white tiles for not washing properly. She recalled that there was "blood all over the white tiles", and her sister suffered hearing problems thereafter.²⁹¹

162 HIA 103 wrote that if the girls were carrying on:

"...the nuns would come down shouting and roaring and would often thump you on the head with a bunch of keys or their fists. The nuns used to grab us by the hair on the side of our heads when we were being disciplined. They would also use a pointer cane on occasion or their fists if you did anything wrong."²⁹²

Witnesses also complained about physical abuse by lay staff. NHB 32 was an older girl who worked at Nazareth House in the laundry; HIA 14 said that NHB 32 pulled her hair and hit her round the head if she did not do the laundry correctly.²⁹³

163 HIA 14 said:

"We just took the beatings and said nothing. There was no one to tell and no one would have believed us. Nobody would have believed that the nuns would have been capable of treating children that way. We also did not know any better and didn't fully appreciate at the time how wrong it was."²⁹⁴

289 SNB 331.

290 SNB 670.

291 SNB 671.

292 SNB 071.

293 SNB 119.

294 SNB 118.

- 164 As HIA 28 pointed out, many children, whom she termed the “goody-goodies”, were not hit. Punishment was for those who stepped out of line, and they were clipped for not dusting under their beds properly, or making their beds or not doing the cleaning. Sometimes they were taken to the sewing room on the ground floor near the changing room to be hit.²⁹⁵
- 165 Other punishments were applied in addition to beatings. SR 122, for example, was said to use Jeyes fluid as a punishment and bathed sores with it.²⁹⁶ When HIA 171 used a de luxe soap which she had been given at a Christmas party, a nun accused her of being vain, and made her kneel outside her cell.²⁹⁷ For running away, girls were made to kneel outside the nuns’ cells and then scrub the passage the following day.²⁹⁸
- 166 There was only one example of a group punishment. According to HIA 20 some girls went out onto the fire escape to watch a firework display. SR 134 punished them by making them kneel all night with their hands behind their heads. Girls in other groups had to spend the night on the fire escape.²⁹⁹
- 167 HIA 197 said:
- “It seemed to me that the girls who didn’t have any family always got it hardest from the nuns, probably because they had no one to turn to. We were also punished more often than the children who had family come in to see them. They were very harsh on us, and slapped and picked on us for very minor things. They were always crushing us. I believe the nuns knew they had to be more careful and they couldn’t be as hard on the girls with families in case they were caught out”.³⁰⁰
- This was not only a question of physical abuse; HIA 197 thought that girls with families also had lighter chores, dusting instead of scrubbing.³⁰¹
- 168 By contrast, HIA 43 thought that the children who had been at Nazareth House since birth formed a clique and were treated better.³⁰² She thought that the nuns were aware of each other’s punishment of the children and said that there was a general atmosphere of fear.³⁰³

295 Day 108, pp.61 to 63.

296 SNB 071.

297 SNB 783.

298 SNB 784.

299 SNB 184.

300 SNB 692.

301 SNB 693-694.

302 SNB 715.

303 SNB 693-694.

169 HIA 37 said:

“I always thought they [the nuns] were very creative in their punishments actually. I mean, I have been brought up at home and I was chastised by my mother and father but never to the extreme cruel methods that they used”.³⁰⁴

“We would be told to kneel and to be caned as this gave extra force to the strikes. The nuns would use both hands for extra strength and cane us until they were exhausted.”³⁰⁵

“You had so many punishments...so bad it’s like they all merged into one big black nightmare”.³⁰⁶

170 It should be noted that of the thirteen witnesses quoted in this section, three were admitted to Nazareth House in the 1940s, six in the 1950s and three in the 1960s. Only one was admitted in the 1970s. The single witness to complain about punishment in the 1970s was HIA 25, who said that he tried to escape at every opportunity. On his return, his shoes were removed till he had to go to school, and he was punished with a beating for doing so every time. On one occasion he and his sister were put in a dark room, where a nun hit them with a broom. HIA 25 had lost both his parents in the previous couple of months and he was desperate to be with his siblings. He felt that the nuns should have understood this but they never sought an explanation.³⁰⁷

171 SR 153 said that it was for individual sisters to decide how to run their groups and she had no idea what other sisters did. No one explicitly said that caning was wrong, but only sisters were allowed to hit children. She said that in her unit when children misbehaved she usually punished children by stopping them from watching television, but even then she often relented and talked to them instead.³⁰⁸

SR 189

172 SR 189 entered the Congregation in 1939 and died about 2004. She was at Nazareth Lodge from 1945 to 1948 but then transferred to Nazareth House from 1948 to 1959, and it is to the latter period that the allegations made by witnesses refer. In 1976 at a General Chapter, SR 189 was

304 Day 107, p.144.

305 Day 107, p.144.

306 Day 107, p.146.

307 SNB 612-613.

308 Day 112, pp.82 to 83, 159 to 160.

elected as Superior General of the Congregation and she served for twelve years in this ministry.³⁰⁹

- 173 SR 189 was clearly highly thought of within the Order. Sr Teresa Walsh wrote:

“[SR 189] although strict was very straight and direct and was not afraid to confront or challenge a person when appropriate. Sister was an extremely hard worker and would not suffer fools gladly. She was a formidable lady but had a good sense of humour.”

The Order denied the more serious allegations made against SR 189, while accepting that she might have used corporal punishment.³¹⁰

- 174 Witnesses made a wide variety of allegations against SR 189. HIA 95 considered her “a rough wicked woman”, and the worst of the nuns. She belted the girls and grabbed them so tightly under the arm that she caused bruises. HIA 95 thought that SR 189 took against her because she was feisty.³¹¹ HIA 30 said SR 189 threatened her and two friends that she would put the three of them in a sack and bury them in a hole because they were bold. HIA 30 said she believed SR 189 because they never doubted anything the nuns said.³¹²

- 175 HIA 166 said that SR 189 caned her for an incident in the chapel, and that she also scrubbed HIA 166’s neck with a scrubbing brush till it was raw and bleeding to get rid of sunburn.³¹³ According to HIA 161, SR 189 was vicious, smacking girls’ heads on the wall. When she bled, she was told to clean it up.³¹⁴ HIA 85 made the same allegation:

“Quite regularly when playing out in the garden, we would be subjected to having our heads banged repeatedly by the nuns against a red-brick wall. On one particular day [SR 189] was banging my head against the wall so severely that [SR 134] announced that she thought I had had enough and [SR 189] stopped.”³¹⁵

- 176 The Order did not accept that a child would be subjected to this treatment.³¹⁶ It is no doubt hard to accept that someone who has held high office in the

309 SNB 661,1907.
310 SNB 1907.
311 SNB 661-662.
312 SNB 757.
313 SNB 294-295.
314 SNB 150.
315 SNB 266.
316 SNB 1975.

Order could also have inflicted the type of cruelty which has been alleged. As the person in charge of the home, SR 189 will have seen herself as being responsible for maintaining overall control, particularly in dealing with bold or feisty girls, but that does not excuse breaches of the Order's policies and the Regulations. We accept that SR 189 not only inflicted formal punishments which breached the Regulations, but also informal physical punishments.

SR 31

177 SR 31 was responsible for Our Lady's group on the top floor. She was also in charge of the school at Nazareth House, and later the school at Ravenhill Road. She was at Nazareth House from 1959 to 1970. In addition to the witnesses who made allegations to the Inquiry, 36 people complained to the police about her conduct.³¹⁷ The evidence below includes accounts of both physical and emotional abuse.

178 Like SR 189, SR 31 was reported to have beaten children in public. HIA 117 ran away. The police picked her up and took her back to Nazareth House. HIA 117 said that after they had left, SR 31 stripped her, placed her on the stage and beat her in front of all the other children as a punishment for running away. SR 31 used some black sticks which were kept in a container. HIA 117 said that she was also belted and hit with rosary beads that night.

179 For informal punishments, SR 31 was said to have used a variety of instruments. According to HIA 117, SR 31 had a practice of knocking her on the head with her knuckles.³¹⁸ HIA 29 said that SR 31 hit her over the head with her keys.³¹⁹ HIA 327 wrote:

“[SR 31] had a massive bunch of keys, like jailer's keys, and she had a habit of digging them into our heads. If we were talking at mealtimes, she would come up behind us and hit us with the keys. They are what I remember most about [SR 31]”.³²⁰

HIA 195 also alleged that SR 31 hit them with keys.³²¹ SR 31 told the police that she only held one or two keys, and she suggested that the witnesses had colluded and shared information.³²² HIA 175 responded

317 SNB 1882.

318 SNB 873.

319 SNB 013.

320 SNB 794.

321 SNB 172.

322 Day 101, pp.54 to 55, 57 to 59, 64 to 66.

that no one had put being hit with keys into her head.³²³ HIA 29 said that SR 31 carried her cane all the time, but sometimes she used a black leather strap. HIA 9 said SR 31 also used a mop handle to hit her across the legs.³²⁴ According to HIA 39, SR 31 also took girls' pants down to smack them on their bare bottoms.³²⁵

180 Girls were hit for a variety of reasons. HIA 124 said that if girls back-chatted or tutted or showed an expression the nuns did not like they were taken to SR 31's room to be caned, to beat the stubborn streak out of them.³²⁶ HIA 84 said that when she cut her knee, SR 31 had no sympathy and beat her for being out of bounds, leaving the cut on her knee to become a permanent scar.³²⁷ HIA 195 said that SR 31 beat her in school for being left-handed. When HIA 84 was caught wearing pants in bed, SR 31 stripped her of her pants and beat her on her bare bottom in front of the whole room.³²⁸ HIA 124 said that SR 31 checked girls' beds at night to see if they were wet, and slapped her about the heads and legs when she wet the bed, making her kneel outside SR 31's cell "all night", praying to God not to wet the bed again.³²⁹

181 The result of SR 31's regime of punishments was that some girls were cowed. HIA 39 was very wary of SR 31 and she was always on her guard, as she saw her hit another girl very badly with a stick.³³⁰ HIA 195 felt she:

"could never do anything right. I was sure to get a slap every day. [SR 31] had her favourites, but I was her punch bag".³³¹

HIA 124 wrote:

"I was terrified of [SR 31]. No matter what you said or did you got hit so it got to the point where I was so subdued I never said anything."³³²

182 Some girls responded defiantly. HIA 197 told us that on one occasion when she was beaten she refused to cry, so SR 31 kept on hitting her, and she had to be kept off school for a week because her hands were black

323 Day 100, pp.132 to 133.

324 SNB 003.

325 SNB 802.

326 SNB 694-695.

327 SNB 722.

328 SNB 722-723.

329 SNB 836.

330 SNB 246.

331 SNB 171.

332 SNB 838.

and blue and swollen.³³³ HIA 430 said that she was sent to a store room just outside the dormitory for punishment but as HIA 430 was stubborn and did not cry, SR 31 did not like it and hit her more.³³⁴ She told us:

“...the more I didn’t cry, the more she hit me, just because I think I was just stubborn and wouldn’t give in to her...”³³⁵

- 183 HIA 37 said that when she and another girl truanted, SR 31 locked her in a room to prevent escape and beat her severely. HIA 37 claimed that she fought back, trapped SR 31 in a corner and made her surrender the key, so that she could get out. HIA 37 said she reached her uncle’s house, who took her to the police and arranged for a medical examination. Neither the police nor the doctor could believe that a nun would inflict such injuries, and HIA 37 was returned to Nazareth House. She understood that SR 31 was disciplined.³³⁶
- 184 HIA 124 said that on the only occasion when she stuck up for her disabled younger sister, SR 31 put her in a drying cupboard on the second floor, where there was just enough room between the racks for a child to stand in the total darkness; she was left there for some time, and when she came out she had missed dinner and SR 31 put her back in the cabinet for answering back.³³⁷ HIA 84 said that SR 31 locked her in a brush cupboard for telling lies, when she reported that an elderly resident in the home had molested her.³³⁸
- 185 HIA 430 told us that some children escaped punishment. HIA 195 contrasted the treatment of SR 31’s favourites with her role as SR 31’s “punchbag”.³³⁹
- 186 Witnesses complained of SR 31’s cruelty in dealing with children with psoriasis. HIA 195 said that when she had psoriasis, SR 31 cut off her hair, shaved her head and scrubbed her scalp with a scrubbing brush till it bled. When she screamed, SR 31 hit the top of her head with the brush, and the more she screamed, the more she was battered.³⁴⁰ HIA 195’s social worker noted that HIA 195 was “easy and co-operative”

333 SNB 694-695.
334 SNB 802.
335 Day 109, p.30.
336 SNB 063-065.
337 SNB 838.
338 SNB 722.
339 SNB 171.
340 SNB 174.

and had “taken the whole thing the treatment extremely well”.³⁴¹ HIA 28 said that when three new girls were admitted with sore heads, SR 31 made her scrub their heads till they bled; she cried and so SR 31 hit her over the head with keys because she was not scrubbing hard enough.³⁴² HIA 161 alleged that SR 116 scrubbed her between the legs with a scrubbing brush, causing her pain.³⁴³

- 187 SR 31 was said not only to humiliate the girls but also to denigrate their parents, which the witnesses had found distressing. According to HIA 430, SR 31 would say:

“You’re illegitimate and you’re a bastard. Who asked you to come here? We didn’t ask you to come here. Your mother left you here”.³⁴⁴

HIA 175 said that her mother visited every week and sometimes they went out. SR 31 ran her mother down, saying she was an alcoholic:

“The way she spoke about mum has filled me with a hatred of her that has hurt me more than any of the physical abuse I suffered”.³⁴⁵

- 188 SR 31 called the girls names. HIA 327 said:

“Her comments hurt me more sometimes than being beaten. That’s what stuck in my head more than the beatings. She was always humiliating us”.³⁴⁶

When her mother visited, the nuns made fun of her and said she was living in sin. SR 31 read out a letter of complaint which HIA 327’s mother had sent, pointing out the spelling mistakes. She said that when she was older and complained, SR 31 said:

“You should never have been born. None of you should ever have been born. Your mother wasn’t even married”.³⁴⁷

- 189 With her combination of physical and emotional abuse, SR 31 stirred up considerable feelings of animosity among the witnesses. HIA 124 said that SR 31 was a very angry woman and “you would see her face going red with rage”.³⁴⁸ HIA 84 thought SR 31 very cruel and a bully. HIA 39 said:

341 SNB 46682.

342 SNB 048.

343 Day 98, p.59.

344 SNB 803.

345 SNB 163, 61464.

346 SNB 795.

347 SNB 795.

348 SNB 836.

“[SR 31] should not have been a nun. She was very wicked and she showed no emotion or affection”.³⁴⁹

HIA 29 also described SR 31 as wicked, while HIA 37 considered SR 31 “the most evil person” she had ever come across in her life.³⁵⁰

190 Having made allowance for exaggeration because of the strength of feelings which SR 31 engendered, we are clear that she physically and emotionally abused many of the children in her care.

SR 134

191 SR 134 was at Nazareth House from 1953 to 1970 and she was responsible for the Sacred Heart group.

192 According to the witnesses, the forms of physical abuse employed by SR 134 were varied. HIA 28 said that SR 134 used to beat her with a wooden walking stick like a shillelagh, and she hid it under her clothes if she saw anyone like the priest coming.³⁵¹ HIA 124 said she was hit over the head by SR 134 with a big bunch of keys. It was only later that day that she found out from another girl that SR 134 had not liked the noise made by the scrunching of leaves. HIA 124 commented that the nuns always hit them on the temples with their keys or their knuckles as the girls did not bruise there.³⁵² HIA 95 said that in the schoolroom SR 134 hit girls’ knuckles with a ruler or used the cane, carrying on till the girl cried. HIA 161 said that SR 134 whacked girls on the knuckles with a big silver serving spoon, such that their hands became swollen and could not be moved.³⁵³

193 SR 134 was also said to abuse girls physically directly. HIA 52 said that:
“[SR 134] used to dig into the soft flesh under your arms with her fingers. The nuns would hit you on the head as well either with their knuckles or these big sets of keys they carried round.”³⁵⁴

According to HIA 20, SR 134 used to nip girls or pull their hair if she thought they were misbehaving in church.³⁵⁵ HIA 103 said that when she was given a BCG injection by the doctor, SR 134 thumped her on the arm

349 SNB 244.

350 SNB 063-065.

351 SNB 043.

352 SNB 839.

353 SNB 665-666 and SNB 150.

354 SNB 811.

355 SNB 181.

and it became swollen and infected.³⁵⁶ HIA 95 told us that she and one of her sisters were in SR 134's group:

“You got thumped by her for anything - there didn't have to be a reason. ...She would grab you by the ears and pull you over to a door and bang your head off the door. She used to bang our heads off the wall outside as well”.³⁵⁷

HIA 95 added that the grounds for punishment could be failure to do work properly, for example if a floor were not clean enough, or for no apparent reason; it depended on SR 134's mood.³⁵⁸ When HIA 62 and a friend climbed over the wall and bought a lot of penny chews to share with the other girls, SR 134 caught them, and shaved their heads in front of the other children.³⁵⁹ At school she had to wear a tea cosy as her head was cold.³⁶⁰

- 194 HIA 14 said that when she went up early for a bath, while the water was hot and clean, SR 134 shouted at her, grabbed her hair and repeatedly pushed her head under the water, holding it down and then pulling her back up by the hair. She remembered being petrified and unable to breathe. She was then beaten with the leather belt which SR 134 wore around her waist. HIA 14 said she had been left with a fear of water, and was unable to take her sons swimming as children and still did not enjoy taking baths.³⁶¹
- 195 Three witnesses, HIA 20, HIA 95 and HIA 37, said that SR 134 grabbed girls' hands and made them batter themselves, saying “I'm not hitting you, you're hitting yourself” or “See, I didn't touch you.”³⁶²
- 196 HIA 95 provided detailed evidence about the way in which SR 134 treated her. As a child HIA 95 suffered a nervous tic, and when she made involuntary movements in Mass SR 134 hit her, once so hard that she saw stars, or stuck a pin in her or “crunched” her in the back. When HIA 95 refused to eat porridge, SR 134 pushed her face in it. She threw brushes at girls when they were polishing their shoes on Saturdays. She shut HIA 95 in a cupboard. She gave girls hidings if there were marks when their underwear was checked.³⁶³ The consequence, HIA 95 said, was that:

356 SNB 072-073.

357 SNB 661.

358 Day 97, pp. 29 to 31, 80.

359 SNB 675.

360 Day 99, pp.71 to 72.

361 SNB 117.

362 SNB 59, 181, 662, Day 107, p.145.

363 SNB 663.

“I lived in constant fear in the home. If you weren’t getting hurt yourself, you were watching somebody else being beaten”.³⁶⁴

197 HIA 62 wrote:

“When I was fourteen [SR 134] was sent away to Hammersmith and a young nun called [SR 153] took her place. [SR 153] was a breath of fresh air. She was twenty-four and she was really artistic. She started to paint flowers on the bare walls of the dormitories and she made a list of all our birthdays. We all got a cake on our birthday - that was the first time we ever had any recognition of our birthdays. [SR 153] had just come from South Africa and she was so compassionate and caring. She saved me. She gave me a purpose in life and was the closest thing to a mother I ever had.”³⁶⁵

198 This evidence demonstrates the importance of the impact of different individuals on children in their care. We are persuaded by the evidence that SR 134 used a variety of forms of informal physical abuse in her dealings with the children in her group.

SR 116

199 SR 189 was replaced by SR 116 who was at Nazareth House from 1961 to 1967, running St Anne’s group. She was seen as nice to begin with, while she was a novice, but HIA 37 said she was clearly influenced by the other nuns and became cruel like them.³⁶⁶

200 Several witnesses alleged physical abuse by SR 116. HIA 95 said that SR 116 took girls away upstairs and when they returned they had either been given sweets or they were crying.³⁶⁷ HIA 37 said that SR 116 used bamboo canes - split and sellotaped together. HIA 20 said that SR 116 had a classroom and girls were made to stand outside and wait for her to call them in for a beating. She used a bamboo cane and hit her until she cried, so she learned to cry as quickly as possible.³⁶⁸ HIA 316 said that SR 116 would always hit her on the knuckles where it hurt the most. She never got hit on the palm, and she used to have swollen black and blue knuckles all the time.³⁶⁹

364 SNB 662.

365 SNB 676.

366 SNB 058.

367 SNB 663.

368 SNB 183.

369 SNB 829.

- 201 HIA 61 thought SR 116 the worst nun as she kept picking on her:
“...always beating me over the head and smacking me across the ear. Sometimes she just hit me with her hand and sometimes she used the metal crucifix of her Rosary Beads, her big leather belt or a big bunch of keys.”
- HIA 61 considered SR 116 “quite sly” as she only hit her when no one else was around.³⁷⁰ On one occasion she woke up with a bandage on her head, having been hit by SR 116 on the side of her head such that her head hit a mirror. She had hearing difficulties subsequently.³⁷¹ HIA 61 was seen by a specialist who, she said, attributed her loss of hearings to the beatings she had had. She was sensitive about having to wear a hearing aid and tried to conceal it with her hair, but SR 116 embarrassed her by showing the other children.³⁷²
- 202 HIA 52 said that once SR 116 gave her a “bad beating” in a room beside the dining room:
“She really lost her temper and lashed out at me. I was trying to protect my body so my back ended up black and blue from the hiding. It was extremely painful.”
- In consequence, when a teacher at school suggested that she should try on a dress she was making, HIA 52 declined, because the teacher would have seen the marks from the beating.³⁷³
- 203 When HIA 161 stayed with a family on a farm in Lurgan, the father and his brother both sexually abused her. HIA 161 told another girl, who informed SR 116, who gave HIA 161 the biggest beating of her life for “telling tales on a good Catholic family”. SR 116 washed her mouth out with carbolic soap, and HIA 161 learned not to report abuse.³⁷⁴
- 204 HIA 257’s view of SR 116 was more even-handed; although SR 116 used a roly-poly stick, a cane and a block of wood to hit her, she felt the punishments were justified and she was never hit gratuitously.³⁷⁵
- 205 HIA 29 said that SR 116 was the worst on bath night, as she used a scrubbing brush on their private parts. She found that the Jeyes fluid

370 SNB 769.

371 SNB 770.

372 SNB 771.

373 SNB 813.

374 SNB 151-152.

375 SNB 338-339.

burned her badly, and made her skin brown, but the girls were not allowed to wash it off.³⁷⁶ HIA 14 said that when she wet her bed SR 116 called her a “filthy cow”, grabbed her head and pushed her face into the wet sheet.³⁷⁷

206 HIA 63 summarised:

“She should never have been in charge of children; she had no compassion whatsoever.”³⁷⁸

Both HIA 96 and HIA 52 saw SR 116 as a wicked woman.³⁷⁹ According to HIA 61, SR 116 had problems wherever she went and had to keep moving countries and changing her name; she was also said to have had mental health problems when she joined the Order at the age of 18.³⁸⁰

207 We accept from the evidence that SR 116 abused some of the children in her care both physically and emotionally.

208 In summary, there were nuns (and later lay staff) throughout the time that the witnesses were in Nazareth House who physically abused children in ways which were contrary to the Congregation’s policy. In particular, four sisters were identified as being the subject of the greatest number of allegations, highlighting the importance of the individual workers and the impact they can have on the lives of children. The fact that they were able to continue to abuse children over a period of years also raises questions about their selection, supervision and management. Their practice may have reflected the way in which some parents and teachers chastised children at that time, but it was contrary to the statutory Regulations and unacceptable as professional residential childcare. **We are satisfied that several sisters and in particular SR 189, SR 31, SR 134 and SR 116 systematically abused children physically and that this was a systemic failing.**

Emotional Abuse

209 The emotional abuse associated with physical abuse has already been noted. This section contains further examples where emotional abuse was alleged. The instances which witnesses found emotionally hurtful were very varied.

376 SNB 011.

377 SNB 116.

378 SNB 686.

379 SNB 663, 811.

380 SNB 771.

210 HIA 387 said she was emotionally abused and humiliated:

“The nuns constantly told us that no one wanted us because we were bad, we were orphans.”³⁸¹

When she had her first period:

“The nuns told me I was an evil wicked child because of what the devil had done to me. They never told me what was actually happening to me.”³⁸²

211 When HIA 439 ran away with three or four other girls, they were returned by the police and the nuns shaved their hair when they returned so that they could be identified and known as the runaways.”³⁸³ The Order does not accept that this happened.³⁸⁴

212 HIA 171 remarked that the nuns did not like her talking to or playing with her sisters. She said:

“The nuns tried to divide everybody; even if you got close to a friend and were having a laugh they would try to divide you”.³⁸⁵

This was echoed by HIA 223 who wrote that the nuns did not like to see the girls make friends and tried to split them up. As an example, she described SR 31’s attempts to break up her friendship with NHB 52, which resulted in HIA 223 being slapped and beaten on three consecutive nights.³⁸⁶

213 HIA 52 said:

“I didn’t really make friends in the home because you could never get too close to someone. You were not allowed to have friendships. We never knew anything about comfort or love. If you saw another child crying, your instinct would be to go put your arm around them but if the nuns saw that, you would get a hiding. We were never shown any love. You were completely on your own. There were no social connections at all; it was just work, work, work.”³⁸⁷

These examples may have reflected the expectation within the Order that special friendships should not be formed as they could undermine the

381 SNB 385.
382 SNB 387.
383 SNB 204.
384 SNB 2042.
385 SNB 781.
386 SNB 316.
387 SNB 810.

community ethos. Nonetheless HIA 166 concluded:

“I formed strong relationships with some of the girls I grew up with and we are still in contact today. We only had each other as we were never shown any type of love or affection from those in charge of our care. I believe the nuns didn’t know how to show love or affection.”³⁸⁸

Some examples related to the way sisters dealt with the girls’ families. SR 131 put HIA 171 in an isolation room after her grandmother had visited; she had hoped to go to stay with her, and SR 31 pointed out that if this had been possible she would not have been in Nazareth House. Grandmother stopped visiting but it was some time before HIA 171 learnt that she had died. She cried inconsolably, and was again placed in an isolation room as SR 31 thought she was waking everyone up with her “nonsense”.³⁸⁹

214 HIA 161 said that SR 116:

“...pulled me up by the hair and lifted me off the floor and she said ‘Your mother is nothing but a prostitute anyway, a drunk and a prostitute, and that’s how you’re going to turn out’”.³⁹⁰

HIA 161 said that this type of thing was said daily and she was never shown love or affection. She said she was called “scum of the earth”³⁹¹ and in oral evidence she said that the nuns declared that there was “no room in heaven” for her family, such that she thought the problem was her family name.³⁹²

215 HIA 197 said that the nuns told her she was ugly, dirty and worthless. When people visited to invite children out, she was sent to the back of the queue. She said she was never given any praise or encouragement and was told by the Mother Superior that she would be damned to hell.³⁹³

HIA 134 said that “[SR 31] was very cold and I felt much neglected in the home”.³⁹⁴ HIA 134 said that SR 31 struck her name off the lists for parties, and she was given a toothbrush for Christmas.³⁹⁵

216 HIA 43 said that the memory had stuck with her of the occasion when she was humiliated and laughed at in front of the other children for having

388 SNB 293.

389 SNB 781.

390 SNB 146.

391 SNB 145.

392 Day 98, p.34.

393 SNB 695-696.

394 SNB 866.

395 SNB 867.

soiled pants. She had tried to conceal them, but her number made them identifiable. She felt that SR 31 despised her:

“She was constantly putting me down, degrading me and making me feel stupid and worthless”.³⁹⁶

She said that the nuns had favourites, who were given sweets, cinema trips and weekends with families, but HIA 43 was not given these opportunities. She concluded:

“Those nuns should never have been involved in the care of children. They seemed to hate children; you could see it in their eyes”.³⁹⁷

- 217 HIA 20 found teasing by other children hurtful when she was called ‘fish’ for bedwetting and ‘dunce’. However, she found the nuns’ cruelty worse, and she said they were constantly degrading the children. SR 31, for example, said:

“Nobody wants you. Do you know why you are here? You were just dumped. Nobody wants you”.

In consequence, she felt that she was only fit to scrub floors, work in the laundry and wash up in the kitchen.³⁹⁸

- 218 Several witnesses said that they were threatened with removal, for example to Muckamore Abbey, a special needs hospital, Middletown, a training school, or Good Shepherd, which operated a laundry where adults and a few older girls worked. HIA 63 said that these threats terrified the girls as they did not want to be separated from their siblings, and they had heard that girls who went to Middletown were never seen again.³⁹⁹

- 219 HIA 250 was at Nazareth House throughout her childhood from 1955 to 1972. She took a balanced retrospective view of the emotional care she received:

“Our life in the convent was basic, which you would expect. We were fed and given a roof over our heads. Our basic needs were met, but there was no emotional side to it; there couldn’t be. Who were we to get that off? In my view that was just a product of society in the fifties - who did care? My family did not. It was worse on the outside than it was on the inside. ...I was an orphan, totally on my own”.⁴⁰⁰

396 SNB 715.

397 SNB 715.

398 SNB 186.

399 SNB 687.

400 SNB 819-820.

- 220 It will be noted that some of the above examples related to the four nuns who were the main abusers. When SR 31, SR 134 and SR 116 ran the three groups there would have been no one to whom the girls could turn for comforting, and the whole atmosphere in the home would have been emotionally abusive, though it is possible that any favourites may have received care and attention.
- 221 The examples above indicate that some of the sisters belittled or humiliated some of the girls, by denigrating their families, telling them that they were evil rather than encouraging them to build up their self-confidence, breaking up friendships, failing to support girls when they were upset, and threatening them with removal to an institution deemed more punitive. **We conclude that the emotional abuse suffered by some girls was systemic.**

Sexual Abuse by Staff

- 222 There were only five possible allegations of sexual abuse by staff.
- 223 HIA 298 said that in the late 1940s a lay worker was bathing her at 4am, and she inserted her fingers into HIA 298's vagina. She recalled the horror of the experience, but being about nine years old there was nothing she could do about it.⁴⁰¹
- 224 HIA 387 said that in the 1950s two nuns used to take her and other girls to the bathroom at night. Having taken off her nightdress HIA 387 had to stand on a table and spread her legs so that they could examine her, with one of the nuns putting her finger in HIA 387's vagina. The nuns also hit her, laughed at her and called her smelly and dirty.⁴⁰²
- 225 HIA 387 also alleged that a priest raped her in the sacristy after she had made confession. Her written and oral accounts are convincing. She told a nun some years later and was promptly transferred to the Good Shepherd Convent.⁴⁰³
- 226 HIA 117 said that in the late 1960s when she was about eight or nine years old a lay worker tried to get into her bed but she beat her out of it.⁴⁰⁴
- 227 HIA 316 recollected that when she was seven or eight she awoke one night to find a priest standing by her bed and her nightdress was around

401 SNB 702.

402 SNB 388.

403 SNB 389,390.

404 SNB 875.

her waist, but she had no memory of anything sexual happening. When she awoke he moved away.⁴⁰⁵ The Order said that a priest would ordinarily have been accompanied by a nun, and NHB 84, who was the chaplain at the time, said he never visited the children at night.⁴⁰⁶ We accepted NHB 84's evidence though we cannot provide an explanation of HIA 316's experience. While there was no explanation for HIA 316's experience we accept that it was a vivid memory for her.

228 The incidents described in the evidence are all different and they do not form an overall pattern to suggest that sexual abuse was commonplace at Nazareth House. This is not to deny the seriousness of the allegations made by the witnesses, but to conclude that they should each be treated as individual instances.

Fr Brendan Smyth

229 Fr Brendan Smyth was a member of the Norbertine Order. He travelled widely in Northern Ireland, visiting children's homes and abusing large numbers of children. The Order acknowledged that he visited Nazareth House, and a number of witnesses made allegations that he had sexually abused them. He was eventually arrested and he died in prison. Chapter 10 deals more fully with his history.

Physical Abuse by Girls

230 There were few references in the evidence to physical bullying by peers. HIA 161 said that she was picked on by other girls, for example being tossed in a sheet, but that the nuns never intervened.⁴⁰⁷ The nuns had favourites, known as their pets, who were given fruit and taken to parties, and when they bullied other girls the nuns turned a blind eye.⁴⁰⁸ Some bullying in a large home like Nazareth House could have been expected, and we do not consider from the evidence that this amounted to systemic abuse.

Sexual Abuse by Girls

231 HIA 28 alleged that when she was eleven or twelve an older girl made her take off her nightdress and get into her bed, lying on top of HIA 28, kissing her, touching her breasts and vagina, and making her reciprocate. This

405 SNB 829.

406 SNB 2143,80077.

407 SNB 149.

408 SNB 148.

continued about twice a week for four to six months, when the older girl took to somebody new.⁴⁰⁹ HIA 85 was sexually abused a number of times by older girls who forced her to perform oral sex on them; these were her most traumatic experiences in the home.⁴¹⁰ HIA 103 said that an older girl tried to get other girls to touch her, but she always pulled her hand away.⁴¹¹ The older girl said that HIA 103's statement was untrue.⁴¹²

- 232 When she was eight or nine, HIA 134 told another girl in secret that an older girl was sexually abusing her, but the message was passed on and reached SR 199, who was responsible for HIA 134's group. She called HIA 134 a liar, which humiliated and devastated her.⁴¹³
- 233 HIA 134 said that she and one of the two boys then in the home attempted sexual intercourse, but it hurt her and she pushed him off.⁴¹⁴ It seems that this was experimental and that they were of a similar age. HIA 368 was admitted to Nazareth House at the age of eight, and he said that older girls in their mid-teens abused him sexually by making him "climb up their nightdress and touch them intimately".⁴¹⁵
- 234 The six instances described above appear to indicate exploration by adolescents. In view of the number of girls who passed through Nazareth House, the scale of sexual activity is unsurprising, and it is likely that the staff were in most cases unaware of it.

Inspections

- 235 The information available about the formal inspection of Nazareth House is very limited, and it was suggested by Dr Hilary Harrison that when the home was closed records would have been destroyed in accordance with Departmental schedules for the disposal of records.⁴¹⁶ It was the practice of the Ministry of Home Affairs to make annual visits, though there was no requirement as there was for industrial schools (which Nazareth Lodge was pre-1950). There are references to annual visits by MoHA inspectors in the home's log for 1953, 1964, two in 1965 and 1966,⁴¹⁷ but while

409 SNB 047-048.

410 SNB 268.

411 SNB 072.

412 SNB 80094.

413 SNB 866.

414 SNB 868-869.

415 SNB 656.

416 SNB 9550.

417 SNB 10308, 10327, 10334, 10335, 10344.

the visits were termed 'annual', there were clearly gaps when visits were not made or when they were not recorded. Since the logs list all the films shown in the home, Christmas parties and trips out, the annual visits cannot have registered as a high priority when the log was written up. Some of the one-line records indicate that the inspectors were happy with the quality of care.

236 Speaking of the 1960s, HIA 171 said:

"When visitors came to the home we were told the night before that people would be here and that we should all be nice. I am not sure if they were visitors or inspectors or what they were called. We were told to be up and on our best behaviour before any such visit. The nuns were the ones who were on their best behaviour on these occasions. When these visits took place you would see things coming out that we have never seen, such as books and dolls. We were never allowed to play with these toys. If any visitor had inspected any of the toys they would have noticed that they had not been played with and that the children just looked at them as if they were something out of space."⁴¹⁸

237 It is reasonable to assume that the pattern of later inspections followed that which we have found in other homes. In 1973 the Social Work Advisory Group was set up, and in accordance with its name it ceased to inspect and offered support and advice instead. Following the Hughes Report it was decided to inspect all homes, and between 1984 and 1986 a systematic approach was taken by the Department of Health and Social Services to inspect all homes. This did not affect Nazareth House, however, as it closed in 1984. There is no record of the SWAG inspecting Nazareth House although there were references in the evidence given to the Hughes Inquiry of a Social Work Adviser visiting the home. **We consider this lack of inspection amounted to a systemic failing by SWAG to ensure that the home was meeting statutory regulations and providing proper care.**

238 There is also very little evidence of complaints in the records which have survived concerning Nazareth House. In the minutes of a divisional group meeting of the Belfast Welfare Authority on 14 June 1971, dissatisfaction with Nazareth House's procedures was voiced; cases had been documented and forwarded to Mr Moore, the Chief Welfare Officer, but at that point no action had been taken. There is no further reference to this concern.⁴¹⁹

418 SNB 782.

419 SNB 18975.

Conclusions

239 The majority of the allegations about abuse at Nazareth Lodge relate to the 1960s and 1970s when the four sisters whose conduct has been considered individually were in post. Witnesses who were resident during that period look back on their time in the home as bleak misery.

240 HIA 197 felt that:

“The whole environment of the home and the school was fear. ...The punishment seemed unnecessary for some things. It was just a way of frightening us and keeping us down”.⁴²⁰

With hindsight HIA 375 said of Nazareth House in the 1960s:

“The nuns did not have any childcare skills or understanding of children. They did not know how to show us love or comfort us. I found out in later years that they were being paid to care for us. I am still angry with Social Services as it was their duty to make sure our physical, emotional and educational needs were being met by the Sisters of Nazareth but they didn’t do this”.⁴²¹

241 HIA 37 said:

“Nazareth House was a bleak, dark place. I suffered physical and mental abuse on a daily basis during the nine years I was kept there. This amounted to thousands of incidents. I remember I used to just lie in bed and think this is a nightmare”.⁴²²

HIA 9 concluded:

“I have no good memories of my time in Nazareth House, only bad ones”.⁴²³

242 It should be noted that once the four nuns had left the home, the flood of allegations virtually dried up. The many witnesses quoted by the Congregation in their final statement who enjoyed aspects of their time at Nazareth House or Nazareth Lodge may have been as truthful and accurate in their accounts as those who made allegations. The fact that some children were not abused does not mean that those who complained did not suffer abuse.

420 SNB 694.

421 SNB 732.

422 SNB 054.

423 SNB 002.

- 243 The allegations of physical and emotional abuse have to be seen against a background which Nazareth House, Belfast, shared with other homes run by the Order. Resources were very limited and it was said that they were chasing the devil by the tail to get more money.⁴²⁴ Yet they did not want to turn any girl away. The outcome was that the number of staff was insufficient to provide individual care, and some of the physical conditions were also poor. A further consequence was that standards of care were not up to date and the girls suffered institutional practices which should have been superseded.
- 244 It is noticeable that standards improved from about the mid-1970s onwards, and by the time the home closed it was offering good standards of care.

Summary of Findings

- 245 The following are our findings:
- (a) **Many of the tasks which the girls were required to perform were of little use to them as preparation for managing their own households, and in our view the excessive chores expected of the girls constituted systemic abuse.**
 - (b) **The infrequency of changing bath water, the use of carbolic soap to clean teeth, the use of Jeyes fluid in the bath, the rough treatment when bathing and the queuing were outdated institutional practices which should have been superseded or never adopted in the first place, and they constituted systemic abuse.**
 - (c) **The punitive approaches described in the evidence would not have given the children any sense of security but would have added to their anxiety; the measures would have been ineffective in dealing with enuresis and constituted very poor childcare practice, amounting to systemic abuse.**
 - (d) **The home nursing described was very poor in terms of the failure to take some problems seriously, the rudimentary treatment given, the physical abuse on some occasions, and the lack of loving care for children who were unwell. This amounted to systemic abuse.**

424 SNB 50752.

- (e) There was no valid childcare justification for confiscating the children’s personal possessions, and this constituted systemic abuse.**
- (f) During the earlier decades, the combination of aspects of poor childcare (such as excessive chores, an institutional approach to bathing, the use of Jeyes fluid, the handling of menstruation and sex education, the poor quality of food, the insistence on eating unwanted food, the failure to celebrate birthdays, the poor quality of education at the school on the premises and the failure to prepare children for discharge) which were all below the standard which might reasonably have been expected at that time we consider amounted to systemic abuse.**
- (g) The public corporal punishments inflicted in the 1950s constituted systemic abuse.**
- (h) The range and variety of examples and the number of witnesses, particularly in relation to SR 189, SR 31, SR 134 and SR 116, indicate that the physical abuse practised by the staff was systemic.**
- (i) We conclude that the emotional abuse suffered by some girls was systemic.**
- (j) We consider the lack of inspection amounted to a systemic failing by SWAG to ensure that the home was meeting statutory regulations and providing proper care.**