

T.P. 1239  
REPORT ON VISIT TO CASTLEDARE JUNIOR ORPHANAGE.

5.7.1948.

Party of Inspection: Mr. H.T. McMinn, Secretary, Child Welfare Department.  
Mr. Denney, State Migration Officer.  
Mr. W.L. Roberts, Inspector, Child Welfare Department.  
Miss G. Paddon, Inspector (A.T.N.A.), Child Welfare Dept.

Dormitories:

- (a) Cubicles.
- (b) Verandah accommodation.
- (c) Rooms other than cubicles.

(a) Cubicles -

generally dingy and in no way bright or attractive; floors stained under the beds by liquid, which undoubtedly was urine, which had dropped there through continual saturated mattresses. In several instances there was still a quantity of urine on the floor, which had not soaked away and no effort had been made to mop it up. Under one bed there appeared to be an area where the urine had dried out on the boards, leaving a salty crust. Many of the wire mattresses of these beds showed a rusty tarnish on the area of contact with urine sodden bed mattress. The mattresses were themselves in a deplorable state. For instance, one appeared to have been thrown out to dry after continual bed-wetting and the dirt had become impregnated on the urine affected area. The mattress covering, in practically all cases, was grimy and dirty. The mattresses themselves were torn and in the first right-hand cubicle off the courtyard of the first block the mattress was nearly torn in half, exposing a mass of brown fibre filling. In this case the Manager, Brother McGee, admitted that a boy was using this bed - the boy's pyjamas, blankets and sheets were stacked on the deer end of the bed - the sheets appeared to be fresh ones; were reasonably clean. However it would not be possible for any person to sleep with any degree of comfort on such a mattress.

(b) Verandah accommodation -

These beds were in many cases covered by nice type of striped, cottage weave bed-spread and the general appearance was tidy. All beds were not inspected, but some sagged very badly and most mattresses had seen better days. I would say that organised daily bed-making, turning mattresses, etc. may have improved their condition for sleeping upon. Fewer beds spaced further apart and not placed end to end, would be more advisable, but of course, in winter months particularly, there is an abundance of fresh air.

The blankets inspected were miserably thin, being I believe, ex Army and American Forces stock: two and three blankets to a bed, and totally inadequate both in quantity and quality to provide necessary warmth for children of tender years sleeping on these verandahs subject to the chill conditions of winter and prevailing cold breezes experienced at this time of the year.

No doubt when the new laundry is functioning the problem of washing clothing will be solved, but practically all pyjamas seen under the children's pillows were grubby and dirty, damp with urine.

(c) Rooms other than cubicles:

There were a number of beds in one room at the northern end of dormitory block and, while these beds were not closely inspected, they looked reasonably satisfactory, were well spaced and I should say this appeared to be the most creditable section of the dormitory accommodation.

2. Locker Accommodation:

This was provided by utilization of a good sized room with wardrobe type wooden lockers in new condition, an asset to the institution, but unfortunately there was no evidence of their utilization, nor were any stocks of clothing seen to be stored there.

3. Lavatories and Bathroom:

Cisterns tested function satisfactorily - one lavatory had been used during the day and excreta was still in the pedestal pan, not having been flushed.

Bathrooms and facilities satisfactory, but apparently the hot-water system was not in operation on the day of the visit as only very cold water flowed from the faucets tested.

4. Schoolrooms:

Two rooms appeared to be over-crowded; doors and windows closed; insufficient ventilation for such groups of children confined for study. One class was being held also in the recreation hall.

5. Recreation Hall:

A very useful building, but this place while being used for schooling limits its possibilities for the purpose it is intended to be used for. In winter months it should be the main recreational centre for the children; also, of an evening before retiring, it is the only place which could provide warmth for the children. There is a large fireplace at one end of the building, but this has been built over by the stage and consequently cannot be used. Arrangements should be made to sectionise the staging so that it can be stored and removed when not in use and be easily erected when desired. The fireplace could then be used for its intended purpose and it is essential that this should be done.

6.

It must be remembered that this Home was built for an entirely different purpose from that for which it is now being utilised, but its general deterioration must be of concern to the Roman Catholic Authorities. Castledare is catering for children who are still little more than babies, who need love, affection, care and attention, which a child of such age would get from a mother. Then, again, existing conditions can easily become detrimental to health. There appears to be no organised medical parade nor any woman qualified to attend to the welfare of these young children. Epidemics have been experienced before in institutions and, in particular, Castledar some years ago had an outbreak of "Vincent's Angina" (a type of trench mouth), which caused no end of expense to the authorities and suffering to the children, and it is possible that infantile paralysis would sweep through this Home with disastrous effect and, in view of the present conditions mentioned in this report, would be difficult to control.

The children appeared to be quite healthy and it is hoped will remain so, but the fresh complexion may be the result of a new climate and fresh air in a new country. Lying in wet

18

beds and dirty clothing will eventually take its toll.

7.

I would like to say that the Manager, Brother McGee, appeared to be disturbed when first faced with the actual condition of the beds, etc., in the dormitories and may not have been aware conditions were so bad as undoubtedly he has many duties to perform and must of necessity leave many tasks to others. It appears that the staff is insufficient and there is an immediate necessity for the "touch of a woman's hand" - trained women if possible - and strictly supervised organisation of clothing, washing, sleeping and general amenities for these children, who are, many of them, anyway, not long out of the kindergarten stage. Lacking proper facilities, care attention and opportunity, what will be the reaction later on their citizenship value.

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*W.L. Roberts*  
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W.L. Roberts.

*G. Paddon*  
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(Miss) G. Paddon