

HISTORY OF BELGROVE

Belgrove Infant Girls' School originated in "Belgrove House", Seafield Road, where it was part of a single school, having mixed junior classes (Junior Infants, Senior Infants, First Class) – girls and boys – and girls (2nd to 6th standard) under the Principalship of Áine, Iníon Uí Cheanainn.

Prior to this, (1954), both Boys' and Girls' Schools were housed under one roof in Belgrove House, but the Senior Boys moved to a new school (1954) on an adjacent site. The classes, 2nd to 6th, were under the Principalship of Micheál Ó Céilleachair.

Boys from Junior Infants to First Class (inclusive) enrolled in Belgrove Girls' School as was normal then, and some years later were eventually moved to another new school against the wishes of the Principal and staff of Belgrove Girls' School. This deprived the serving lady teachers of professional, promotional prospects, as numbers on roll had greatly decreased due to the transfer. A special INTO meeting was called, convened and held in the Mansion House, during which the lady teachers debated their case. Unfortunately, the results were not to their satisfaction and the Department of Education sanctioned the enrolment of boys only in the Boys' School and girls only in the Girls' School.

Later, to alleviate the loss of promotional prospects, the remaining school – Infant Girls to 6th standard – was divided into two schools. The first was under the Principalship of Mrs S McCarthy (Infants to First Class inclusive) and the remaining 2nd to 6th under the Principalship of Áine, Iníon Uí Cheanainn. Mrs S McCarthy had been a member of staff in the old St John the Baptist School on Lower Vernon Avenue under the Manager then, Archdeacon McMahon, prior to the move to Belgrove House in 1940.

Conditions in the School

The staff of the Girls' School endured very adverse working conditions for years e.g. outside toilets for girls and boys, infestation of rodents, poor central heating, draughty conditions, no staff room, inadequate cloakrooms and, on one occasion, the collapse of one of the ornate ceilings in a downstairs classroom during school hours. Fortunately, the class of 70 Junior Infants was in the yard and no one was injured.

Class Numbers were extremely high in the 1950's and 1960's. In the Junior and Senior Infant classes there were 60, 70, 80, 90 and sometimes more. At First standard, these classes were divided and one could have up to 50 children or over then.

Due to inadequate accommodation, the old outbuildings of Belgrove House i.e. the hayloft, etc. were used as classrooms – two of which were reached by way of one rickety, outside wooden staircase. There was no central heating in these rooms and no toilets. Children had to travel to the outside toilets in the main building. It was a very unhygienic situation with no thought of fire safety whatsoever. At one particular time, the Church of Ireland authorities kindly lent the use of their church hall for a class, to alleviate our problems.

Eventually, a new Girls' School complex was built on the site of the outbuildings and tennis courts of the old Belgrove House. The junior teachers were the first to occupy the two-storey building. Later, the Senior School took occupancy of their three-storey building. The present recreation hall was built centrally between the two schools some years later, which was to be shared by both schools.

The school was built under the management of the Very Rev Fr P J Carton, PP, who by then had four separate schools under his care and serving the three local parishes of St John's, St Anthony's and St Gabriel's. The buildings were officially opened and blessed by the Most Rev Dr Dermot Ryan, Archbishop of Dublin in 1972. Very Rev Fr P J Carton, PP, St John's, was the first Manager of Belgrove Junior Girls' School. He was followed by Right Rev Monsignor Liam Martin, PP, St John's. Subsequently, he was followed by Very Rev Fr Donal O'Leary, PP.

Prior to Mrs S McCarthy's retirement as Principal, Mrs M Hughes was appointed Principal for four years. She was followed by Mrs E McHugh, who was then appointed Principal in 1978 and remained in that position for 21 years until her retirement in 1999. Mrs Mary Kenny was appointed Principal 1999 and retired in 2007 after 33 years in Belgrove. Following Mary Kenny's retirement, Patricia O'Donoghue, who was on the teaching staff at Belgrove, was appointed Principal.

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