

Ballinamore, Co Leitrim

As so often happened in the nineteenth century, yet another Parish Priest made a request for a Mercy foundation in his parish. This time the Parish Priest was Fr. Thomas Brady and the destination was Ballinamore, Co Leitrim. Sr. Joseph Aloysius dispatched three Sisters from Belturbet to start the foundation. Sr. Joseph Holohan, Sr. Philomena O'Brien and Sr. Stanislaus Molloy were welcomed to Ballinamore on 21st November 1871. Their first residence was a building, which had formerly been used as a R.I.C. barracks, and their first school was a two-roomed thatched house. As was usual at the time, the Sisters had two separate schools, one for the poor and another for the children of the landed gentry, who could afford to pay school fees.



Convent of Mercy, Ballinamore, Co Leitrim

By 1889 the Sisters had been gifted a new two storey school adjacent to the convent. At their own expense, and in the convent building, they provided secondary education for those who could benefit from it. The teaching of music was a speciality of the Ballinamore Sisters. At times, teaching music on a daily basis after their day's teaching in the school had ended as many as eight Sisters. The children of the area were fortunate to have been members of a band where they learned to play an instrument as well as acquiring a love of music. In times when money was scarce, the Sisters assiduously searched for ways to help the women of Co Leitrim to earn supplementary income. Lace making could be engaged in at home whenever there was time to spare from farm and housework. It was considered ideal for the hard-pressed women of the time. As well as teaching this skill, the Sisters used their contacts to help market the lace. A very successful lace factory was set up where the craft was taught, worked and sold.





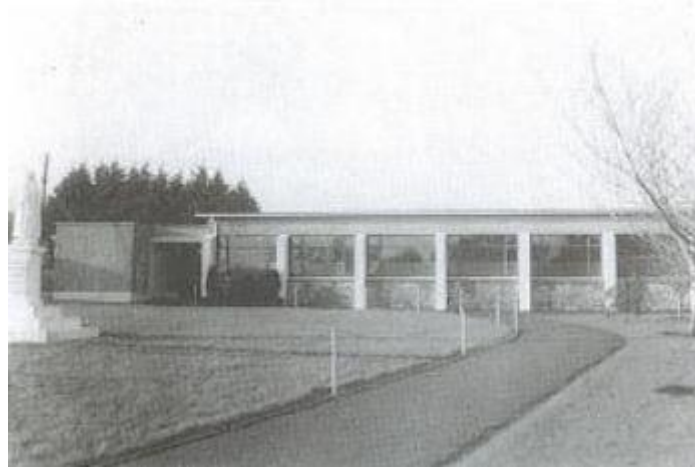
Presentation of a car by parishioners to mark Centenary in Ballinamore

Meánscoil Fatima dates back to 1950 when the Sisters of Mercy began secondary education and a new school building was opened on 6th December 1954. The school was to be involved in many changes in the intervening years to provide the best educational opportunity for students from Ballinamore and surrounding areas. The Vocational School was set up in 1941, St. Felim's College, diocesan school in 1962. All three Schools have played a very important role in second level education in the town over the last sixty years. In 1968, the three schools set up a unique system of co-operation by coming together with common enrolment and a sharing of teachers, resources and facilities, in effect operating as a single school, benefitting the pupils enormously.



Junior Primary School, Ballinamore

In 1994, Meánscoil Fatima amalgamated with Saint Felim's College becoming Fatima & Felim's Secondary School, continuing to co-operate with the Vocational School and using the three school buildings. In 2001, the Minister for Education and science announced that an amalgamation of the Vocational and Secondary School would result in a Community School.



Scoil Fatima Secondary School, Ballinamore

An almost 40-year campaign by staff, parents, trustees, students and the community for a new school building yielded the desired result, when in 2008 the commitment to a new single site school to be built under the Public Private Partnership model was given. Work commenced on the new building in November 2012 and was completed in January 2014.



Leaving Meánscoil Fatima on 26th February, 2014



Staff and Students walk to the new Community School on 26th February 2014

February 26th 2014 was a historical and memorable day for the students and staff of the post-primary schools in Ballinamore, when the doors were closed for the last time in all three schools, Meánscoil

Fatima, St. Felim's College, Vocational School, and the school community moved to the new Ballinamore Community School. A ceremonial locking of the main door in each building took place, and staff and student from each school then merged to walk in symbolic procession to their new school.



Entering the new Community School, Ballinamore

The work of the Sisters continues, changing and adapting in response to the needs of the day.