

Charity apologised for media coverage but not for service cuts or hefty wages

By Niamh Griffin

HEALTH CORRESPONDENT

PARENTS whose children are cared for by St John of God say the controversial charity added insult to injury by apologising for 'media coverage' of salary top-ups to senior management.

They say they were 'delighted' with the coverage after the Irish Mail on Sunday revealed the unsanctioned payments, which came to €1.6m.

They are also outraged at the 'scandalous' wages paid while services in some areas were cut, including removing hot meals for children with disabilities.

Brother Donatus Forkan, who is Provincial of the West European Province of St John of God, wrote to parents in the wake of the MoS revelations, to explain the background to the top-ups, and the letter finished with the words: 'I would like to state that I am deeply sorry for any disquiet, disappointment or hurt you have suffered on account of the media coverage over the past number of weeks.'

Aisling McNiff, whose son Jack has been using St John of God services at St Raphael's school in Kildare for six years, said: 'They are sorry for the media coverage, but not sorry for what they

St John of God added insult to injury for us parents



OUTRAGED:
Aisling McNiff
with her son
Jack

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CHARITY

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did. That is unbelievable, it's adding insult to injury.'

She added: 'To be honest, we as parents were delighted with the coverage, without it we would not know about this.'

Parents also want the charity to be brought before the Oireachtas Health Committee.

A HSE inquiry sparked by the MoS revelations is understood to also cover credit card spending, including that by CEO John Pepper. His salary is €182,000.

Ms McNiff said: 'It is scandalous. I think St John of God should be brought up in front of the Health Committee. How can they justify those wages when they are cutting back services?

'HIQA came in and had to close down some units due to the conditions. It's sickening.'

Parents also called for the HSE to have a representative on the board of St John of God, but Health Minister Simon Harris has previously said he has no plans to do this. The families have already met Brother Forkan and the charity's regional director Claire Dempsey, as well as TDs, in an effort to bring attention to their concerns.

Ms McNiff said families were

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CHARITY CHIEFS GOT €2M IN SECRET TOP-UPS

CONTROVERSIAL REVELATIONS: How the Irish Mail on Sunday revealed the secret top-ups and spending at St John of God

'gobsmacked' to read that senior managers had attended a conference in Florida at a cost of more than €20,000 around the time a school in Dublin run by the order was threatened with closure.

They are also worried about the impact this is having on their own fundraising. Money raised by families for St Raphael's goes directly to the school, but this is not always understood.

She said: 'Why are we fundraising when some people are earning huge salaries? It's not the staff who meet Jack every day who're on this money, they're not

paying them high wages. A lot of people don't want to fundraise now. This is not just about children. A new school is being built at St Raphael's, but it's being built where adult services are now. The families of those 33 adults don't know what is coming next.'

A spokesman for St John of God community services said: 'I can confirm that Brother Donatus and Clare Dempsey met with a representative group of parents recently. Arrangements are being made for a follow-up meeting with the group.'

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