

St Thomas More's School

c. 1936 – c. 1944

Other Names:

- St Thomas More's School
- St Thomas More School for Backward Children
- St Thomas More's School for Backward Children

Details

St Thomas More's School was a private special school located at Linden Lodge, Linden in the early 1940s. It was set up by Marva Temple, who had been Principal of Moresland Special School in North Springwood. Temple was Catholic and supported by clergy, but did not receive funding from the Catholic Church or charities. The school catered for children described as 'difficult, backward and other handicapped children'. Facilities included a nursery for under-sevens with a Kindergarten teacher and individual tuition, a fully trained Matron on staff and a separate house for boys over 12 years. It is not clear when the Home closed.

Marva Temple was an activist around the education of children who were described as "mentally deficient". Alan Searle, in *Historic Woodford and Linden*, says that Temple was conducting the Moresland Special School in North Springwood when she set up the St. Thomas More's School for Backward Children at Linden Lodge, Linden, with four teachers and 15 students.

Temple appears to have leased Linden Lodge, a one and a half storey Victorian brick house close to the Great Western Highway that dates from 1865-1876. The exact opening date of the school is unknown but it was advertised in *The Farmer and Settler* in October 1936.

The advertisement contains information about the School, described using offensive historical language:

*For Backward Children
Special School for Backward and other Problem Children and Girls.
Specialists' patients received.
Modern education and remedial training.
Gardening and outdoor occupations. Games.
Own Cows, Poultry and Garden Produce.
Entire charge if desired.
Separate Nursery for Children Under Seven Years.
The school is conveniently situated in extensive grounds on the Main Western Rd, 2 hours run from
Sydney.
ST. THOMAS MORE'S SCHOOL, LINDEN, BLUE MTS.*

The Home was reportedly saved from bushfires the following month.

Marva Temple wrote to *The Sydney Morning Herald* in August 1937 to advocate for special schools. She believed 'mentally retarded children' were dispirited by class competition, and needed close attention from teachers. She wrote:

In their right environment (namely, in special boarding schools), these children are happy, friendly, and eager to help one another. In a "special school" class work is practically non-existent; each child develops at its own rate, his or her work being only compared with previous individual work, not with that of other children.

At a fundraiser held in Sydney in August 1938, Catholic priest Father Geer spoke about the Home:

Father Geer spoke on behalf of the school, and said he hoped that soon this good work would be under the auspices of the Catholic charities. There were many more applications than can be taken by the school, because of lack of funds, and it seemed a pity to have to close the doors to these needy cases.

Father Geer explained that the school was run by Catholic women for the education of children who are mentally unable to cope with the ordinary school curriculum and the exigencies of ordinary boarding school life.

If placed in a school like this, the backward child is often harmed by the ever present competition with the more mentally alert child, while should the child be kept close at home there is a tendency to make it so dependent on its parents that in the event of their death there will come almost disaster to the child.

Father Geer urged all present to form a committee and interest themselves in this fine and much – needed work, while it had been proposed to hold a car drive to the school, at Linden, Blue Mountains, one Sunday, when the weather was more certain, perhaps in mid-October.

During the afternoon several children from the school, dressed in pretty blue uniforms, sold sweets and posies of camellias.

Later that year *The Sydney Morning Herald* reported that Temple took a group of children from the Home to St Mary's Cathedral to perform a Nativity play. The performance was considered the first of its kind in Australia, and the players used a simplified script written by Margaret Charteris, the wife of Professor AH Charteris, and set to music by 13 year old Charlie Mackerras. The article stated the producer was Temple 'who considers it an interesting experiment in the education of such children.' The children were told the Nativity story, then worked with teachers to 'make up their own little version of it'.

The publicity appears to have paid off, as Searle states that Temple bought the property in 1940. She ran it for some time into the 1940s. After Temple sold the Linden Lodge property it changed hands twice before being restored from 1979.

More info

Related Entries

Related Organisations

- [Moresland Special School \(c. 1933 - c. 1936\)](#)

The Principal of Moresland Special School, Miss Marva Temple, set up St Thomas More's School for Backward Children.

Resources

- [Training the child](#), The Canberra Times, 28 July 1928

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