

A walk through history

How the 'tykes' changed the system

Special report

By LOUISE THROWER

IN a symbolic act this Friday 700 Catholic School students will walk the short journey from Seiffert Oval to Sts Peter and Paul's Cathedral.

Their parade will mark the triumph of the State aid debate exactly 50 years ago, the courage of leadership and a community united.

Back on July 16, 1962 Goulburn's Catholic School students were walking the other way. Some 640 of the city's 1350 'tyke' children were enrolled in state schools, including Goulburn High.

Then principal, the late Jack Plews, told the new arrivals he'd do his best to accommodate them and "make it an enjoyable learning experience for everyone."

The July 1962 Catholic School 'strike' as it came to be known, has gone down in history as the catalyst in winning state funding for independent schools.

A humble and inadequate toilet block at Our Lady of Mercy Preparatory School in Bourke St was the unlikely start of it all.

Threatened with deregistration if

the 300-student school didn't build another three toilets, the Sisters of Mercy took up the matter with Bishop John Cullinane.

The church simply didn't have the money, the Bishop told the City Council and state government.

With the health and education departments at loggerheads and a non-responsive Premier Heffron, the church, backed by angry parents took matters into their own hands.

As St Patrick's College president, Brother FD Marzorini would later write: "The plot of the Goulburn School strike has all the elements to make a highly successful comedy series on Australian television.

"There were the bumbling bureaucrats, embarrassed and buck passing politicians, a country bishop at the head of a town full of indignant Irish Australian Catholics, a St Trinian's style use of school children to invade the state schools, and it was the state of the lavatories that began it all!"

The issue catapulted already prominent men like dentist Brian Keating, solicitors JB Mullen and Kevin Walsh, bank manager Arthur Rolfe to the fore.

■ Continued, with more reports, pages 6 and 7.



PART OF HISTORY: Trish Groves reflects on the 1962 catholic school 'strike,' her less than memorable week at Goulburn North Public School and the strides in education funding since. **BACK THEN:** The young Trish Wyles as a St Joseph's Primary School student. Main photo: Louise Thrower



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