

# It's been 20 tough years for Sacre Coeur School

By LORI TAYLOR  
Herald staff writer

It took some time and effort to convince the powers-that-be that there was a need and a desire for French language education in Halton Hills back in the early Sixties, but almost twenty years later, Ecole Sacre Coeur is still going strong.

The school started in 1960, with 33 children from grades one to grade five being housed in a portable on the property where the present school is located, in a building shared with Holy Cross School. In order to come up with those 33 children, members of the French association looked through the phone book and called everyone with a French name.

In 1961, the school expanded to include grades six, seven and eight, and moved into two classrooms in the present building.

**SIT-DOWN STRIKE**

In 1964, the school and the community made headlines

across the country when parents and friends of the school held a sit-down strike to back up their demand for a French-language kindergarten. At that point, the local French association had hired a teacher on its own, and was conducting a class in the basement of a store. This continued from September until May, when the separate school board approved the kindergarten.

Getting the school its own principal was another difficulty.

"We didn't get that principal from prayer," Theresa St. Jean, one of the leading members of the French association, said. "We got him after trip after trip after trip to the Ministry of Education in Toronto." Miss St. Jean said the group started out meeting with then-minister of education William Davis, but it wasn't until after Thomas Wells had taken over the post that the decision was made to give Ecole Sacre Coeur its own

principal.

Ecole Sacre Coeur is a school for children whose mother tongue is French, or who have one French-speaking parent. The school provides instruction in French in all subjects in English. Instruction in English grammar begins in grade three, and by grade eight, the students have the same level of instruction in English as English-speaking students, principal Paulette Norman said.

Mrs. Norman has been with Ecole Sacre Coeur as principal for four years. Prior to that, she had had five years' teaching experience in Sudbury, Toronto and Mississauga. Mrs. Norman said she is one of four women principals in the Halton Separate School Board.

**A CHALLENGE**

"I personally found it a challenge when I came here, with only five years experience," Mrs. Norman said. "I feel I had a point to prove. I think the school has grown a

lot in four years, not in population, but in other ways."

The school operates separately, with its own budget, teaching staff and so on, in spite of the fact that it shares the facilities of Holy Cross School.

"There's no such thing as the English students here and the French students here," Mrs. Norman said. She pointed out that the two schools participate jointly in numerous activities, and said Sacre Coeur is also taking part in sports events and other activities with the English-speaking schools in the area such as Howard Wrigglesworth Public School.

"We find it hard here at the school because we have to compete with the English community," Mrs. Norman said. "We have to set a Francophone atmosphere. We have a French month with certificates being presented to students for achievements in French. Our activities are geared to French culture. The

last play we performed was from Montreal."

"One of the school's goals is culturally what we can give the children," she continued. "Because of our English environment, we have to work on the cultural aspect. We try to give the children pride in their mother language, and we include things like French folk dances and French songs in our programs."

**VERY LUCKY**

And the children's reaction to their position?

"The children realize they're very lucky in speaking two languages," Mrs. Norman said. "There aren't any problems with the children feeling 'different' or 'alienated.'"

Mrs. Norman estimated that about half the homes are French-speaking, with the rest being homes where one parent is French. She said many families make an effort with French-language television, records and books.

Most of the school's educational material comes from Ontario with the remainder coming from Quebec. Mrs. Norman said the ministry of education began subsidizing publishers of French language texts this year, and if subsidies continue, eventually all the school's educational material will be from Ontario.

Mrs. Norman said one of her personal goals when she arrived at Sacre Coeur was to make the public more aware of the school's existence.

"I wanted the public to be aware that the school existed and I think we've reached that goal," she said. "We'd like to see the school continue to participate in the community and activities sponsored by other schools. I see the school as an integral part of the community."

"One of my personal goals is to have the parents more involved in the school's daily activities," Mrs. Norman said. "I'd like to encourage the parents to become involved as parent volunteers, and I want to encourage them, with the help of the Parent Teachers Association, to come in and participate."

**SCHOOL LIBRARIAN**

The school has 5½ teachers, with the school librarian teaching one half day, and a part-time teacher taking the other half-day.

Mrs. Norman said she performs her administrative duties in the morning and does remedial work in the afternoon, acting as the school's resource teacher. She spends a certain amount of time in the classroom with the students.

"I like to keep abreast of what's going on," she said. "The children like it when I come in to give a test because they know it's a kind of summation or evaluation. It also gives me the opportunity to judge the progress of the children if I go into the classroom periodically."

There are three French schools in Halton, the other two being in Oakville and Burlington, and Mrs. Norman said the three schools tend to stick together. The principals meet once a month to discuss common problems.

"Those days really help," Mrs. Norman said. "Sometimes you get the feeling that you're alone. But we're encouraged because nowadays parents are more

aware of what we're doing. Also, the Francophone community in southern Ontario is becoming more prominent, so there is less of a feeling of being isolated."

Mrs. Norman said the school will probably not change too much in the future, aside from the on-going process of improving the various programs. The English program is one of continuing concern, because the school must ensure that the students have a good command of English in order to function in the community, Mrs. Norman said.

**BUS TRANSPORT**

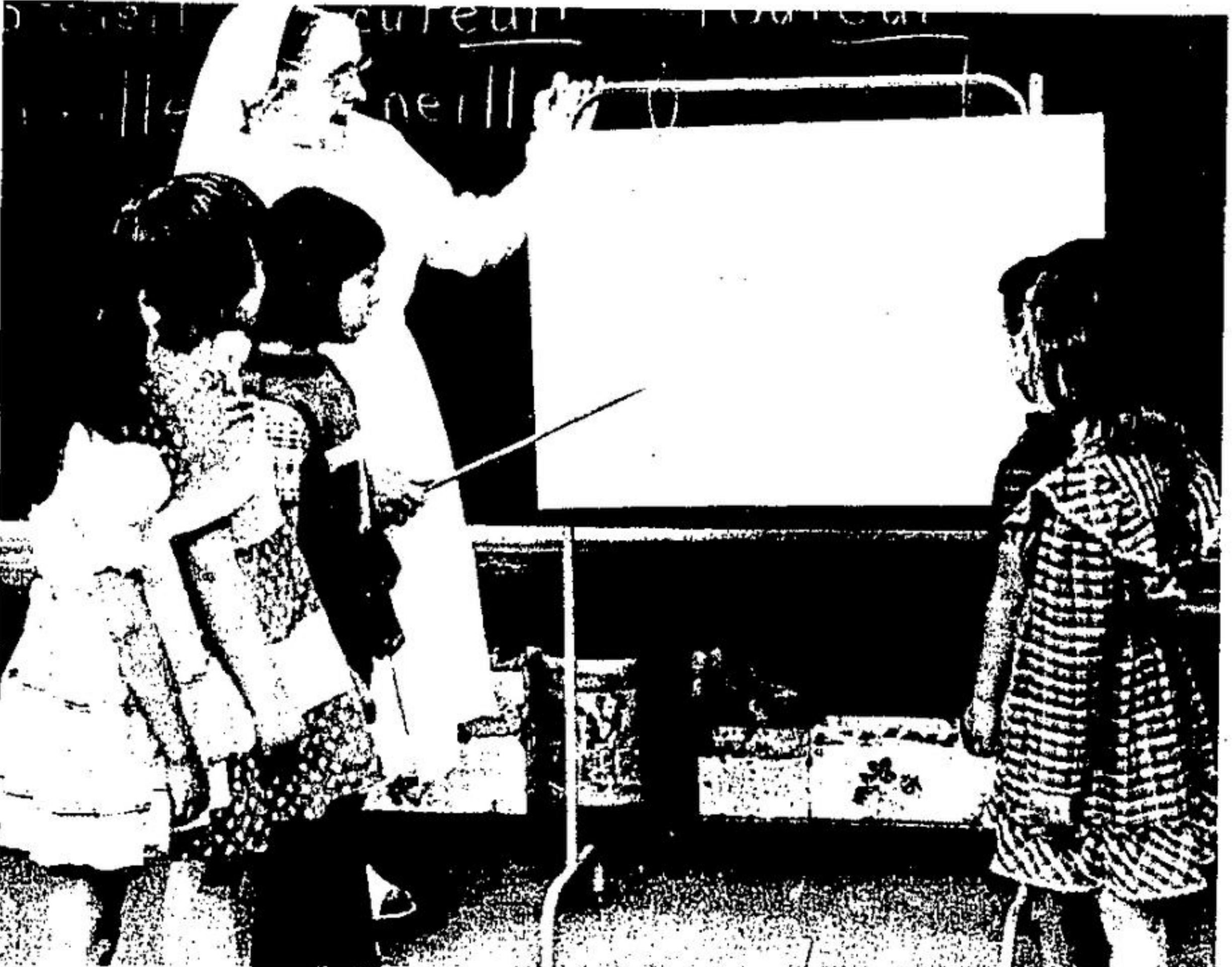
The school is looking into the possibility of organizing bus transport for French-speaking children in Milton, to transport them to Ecole Sacre Coeur.

Mrs. Norman said. If enough families were to become interested in such a program, changes would have to be made to accommodate those students.

"If we had our own school, it would be much better," Miss St. Jean said. "But we haven't, so we have to be satisfied."

"It's a vibrant school community," Mrs. Norman said. "I like to say that the quality here is small, but the quantity is excellent. We always have some activity going on."

"I'm not worried about the survival of the school, but I think we'll reach success with our goals," Mrs. Norman said. "I think we're doing good things. Our children are doing well and learning things. I think we have a good school."



Sister DesRosiers leads some of her students in a French song at Ecole Sacre Coeur. The school, which provides instruction in the French language for students whose mother

tongue is French, has been open almost twenty years, and still appears to be going strong.

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