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Feature

Camphill's approach: relevant and effective for today's vulnerable learners

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Camphill School Aberdeen (CSA) is an example of Social Pedagogy in practice. Care, education therapeutic and creative activities are integrated. Relationships and social interaction, based on mutual care and respect, promote healthy development and resilience along with physical and emotional wellbeing. The school uses Waldorf teaching approaches and the Waldorf curriculum, which is closely aligned with the Curriculum for Excellence (SEED, 2004).

Overview of provision

Building on the years of experience of working with vulnerable learners, Camphill School Aberdeen has also developed a number of additional successful outreach and specialist services to address identified needs.

Supporting families has been part of the Camphill ethos from the outset. The school's **St Andrew's Project** builds on this experience and provides outreach support for children, young people and their families who require extra help and support due to the risk of family or school breakdown. The project is registered to provide school-home support services, respite services, emergency care, individualised therapeutic programmes and family work. St. Andrew's also offers individualised transition programmes and respite services.

Amber Kindergarten is CSA's inclusive nursery, based on the Murtle Campus. It offers a holistic education for all children aged 2½ to 6, with or without additional support needs.

The innovative **Nature Nurture Project** (www.naturenurture.org.uk) works to improve the life chances of disadvantaged and vulnerable children and young people through an early intervention programme. The project is based on the restorative effects of free play in a natural environment, combined with nurturing interactions of specially-trained staff. This builds resilience in vulnerable children and young people, many of whom come from families affected by substance misuse, alcohol abuse, domestic violence, abusive relationships, neglect and poverty.

The **Sapphire Project** offers day placements for young adults with additional support needs who wish to continue learning life skills and receive adult further education. The opportunities include crafts, work in the garden, farm or other work placements and activities such as art, music and drama.

Engaging with current and future challenges

Looking to the future Camphill School Aberdeen aims to continue working proactively with local authorities and other stakeholders – not least children and their families – to put its values into practice by meeting identified needs in line with the GIRFEC principles (Scottish Executive, 2005). There is an increasing focus on working towards reintegration of children into their home communities and schools, reducing their time in residential care and education – strengthened by CSA's transition programmes. Through the provision of crisis care and accommodation for whole families the school also aims to prevent children becoming 'looked after'. To achieve this, CSA is committed to work in partnership with local authority education and care services and the NHS. The aim is to develop the availability and uptake of cost-effective services that also meet priority needs.

As part of its current re-organisation, Camphill School Aberdeen is developing its Early Years and Nature Nurture provision both on our own campuses and elsewhere in Aberdeen City and Shire, in line with the proposed changes in the Children and Young People's (Scotland) Act 2014. In addition at the other end of the age spectrum, as there is a severe shortage of placements for young adults, the school will increase the number of places available for this age group including the availability of all-year 52-week placements, as well as developing the successful individual therapeutic programmes it currently offers.

Camphill may be in its 75th year, but Camphill School Aberdeen is determined to keep its services relevant to 21st century needs. It is one of only 14 schools in Scotland and the only one in Aberdeen to hold the international Autism Accreditation standard. With its commitment to empowering and supporting pupils, the school has received a resounding vote of confidence from parents with 100% approval rating in the most recent reassessment. This is no isolated accolade. In the most recent inspection of additional support needs provision by Education Scotland and the Care Inspectorate (17 January 2012), the school was recognised as achieving 'outstanding sector-leading' standards. Of the eight set standards, three were graded 'excellent' and the remaining five 'very good'. The inspection team noted: 'The school's ethos is outstanding and the levels of pastoral care of the children and their families are very high'.

The eco-school initiative

The children and young people are also fully engaged with the challenges of the 21st century, for example safeguarding the environment. Sustainability has been a guiding principle of Camphill since 1940 when Camphill School Aberdeen opened its doors to children with additional support needs and certainly long before eco concerns featured on the international agenda. This principle has been endowed with new vigour thanks to the enthusiasm of today's pupils. Anyone who has visited Camphill School Aberdeen recently will have seen the Eco-Schools Green Flags flying proudly on each campus. They mark the school's achievement of the gold standard in the international Eco-Schools initiative, the culmination of a two-year strategy driven by the Eco Committee of the Pupil Council. A key element in its success is getting people involved. The Eco Committee wasted no time in setting up events to involve the whole school community. One such event was a litter pick-up on the old Deeside Railway line, a popular walkway that passes close to both campuses. Not only could people get involved in collecting the litter, there was work for many in sorting it for recycling.

Even closer to home, the Eco Committee embarked on a programme of improving the environment of the school itself. This included the very practical project of making new litter bins. In parallel with this the pupils set about tidying up the schoolhouse and school grounds, setting up recycling initiatives for all the classes, planting flower beds and caring for indoor and outdoor plants. Behind these 'community involvement' events, the Eco Committee's efforts were even more ambitious. They aimed to change lifestyles and alter attitudes. Their message was that lots of small changes can make a big difference. Regular examples of how to make a difference were presented to the school community. For example, one issue of the '*Pupil's View*' newsletter urged: 'Have showers instead of baths'. 'Use bikes instead of cars'. 'Switch off the lights when not in room'. 'Fix, or recycle, old furniture instead of burning it'. The enterprising pupils even took their Eco-School message to the Scottish Parliament when they went to meet with MSPs prior to a parliamentary debate on Camphill. Alison McInnes, the MSP who proposed the debate, was impressed by the drive and enthusiasm of the group.

'Camphill School's Eco-committee is one example of the sort of pupil-led initiative that makes the movement so successful'

The Eco Committee's initiative was the main element in their entry for the Guardian Teacher Network and Zurich Municipal national competition entitled *'The School We'd Like'*. Camphill made it to the semi-final – the only Scottish school for children and young people with additional support needs to do so. At the semi-final in Newcastle two pupils, led the school's presentation, titled *'Beyond the Classroom'*, which highlighted how Camphill uses the natural environment to support learning. Their presentation explained how the focus of the Eco Committee that year had been on food and energy saving. It was a great experience for the pupils to travel to Newcastle by train and present their case in front of a large audience at the Life Science Centre. Although a place in the final eluded them, the school's delegation came back with a recommendation to try again next year. As Laurence Alfred, Executive Director at Camphill School Aberdeen, confirms

'The Eco-School initiative was led by the pupils. The great thing is that it became a whole school activity involving children and young people with additional support needs, co-workers at the school, council members and parents.'

The Eco-School initiative is an example of Camphill's belief that every individual has abilities and Camphill School Aberdeen empowers and supports them to use these abilities within the school community. Everyone contributes to the life of the school and the wellbeing of fellow community members in their own way. Everyone supports each other. As a result the initiative aligns strongly with the Curriculum for Excellence's responsible citizen attributes and capabilities, for successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors," and with GIRFEC's SHANARRI indicators (Safe, Healthy, Achieving, Nurtured, Active, Respected, Responsible, Included)(Scottish Executive, 2005).

References

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