The work of the Camphill Movement in Scotland was celebrated in the Scottish Parliament with a motion put forward by NE Scotland MSP Alison McInnes.

Among the guests in Holyrood for the debate were pupils and teachers from Camphill School Aberdeen, which grew from the original community established at Camphill House, in 1940.

“I am delighted to have the opportunity to invite Camphill to parliament,” Mrs McInnes explained. “It’s a great chance to highlight and celebrate the wonderful work that Camphill do, not only here in Scotland, but around the world.

“By hosting a reception and leading a Parliamentary debate on Camphill, I hope that not only can we raise Camphill’s profile, but also allow MSPs to meet some of the people involved in the movement and learn about Camphill communities in their constituencies.”

Alison McInnes visited Camphill School Aberdeen twice in the run up to the debate. She also visited Simeon Care for the Elderly, and has seen for herself the support that Camphill provides to people of all ages.

During her introduction of the debate, Mrs McInnes spoke about the strengths of Camphill School Aberdeen and the collaborative work it does with the University of Aberdeen on the BA course in social pedagogy.

“What concerns me is the lack of recognition of the benefits of this approach by statutory authorities and the significant difficulties that parents, in particular, can face in securing funding from local authorities for residential care or education of this nature,” she told the parliament.

“Parents tell me that it can be such a battle, and it is often only when things are at breaking point that funding is agreed.

“What I saw when I visited Camphill yesterday was what I would consider to be the embodiment of whole-life learning and the notion that learning does not just exist in the classroom or the school but is part of life,” Mr McDonald added.

NE Scotland MSP Lewis Macdonald highlighted the fact that Camphill School Aberdeen is the first school in the city to hold Autism Accreditation and was also graded as ‘excellent’ or ‘very good’ in all areas of its Education Scotland / Care Commission assessment.

The final speaker was Dr Alasdair Allan, the Minister for Learning, Science and Scotland’s Languages. “By way of conclusion,” he said, “let me say that Camphill provides an outstanding education in its broadest and most inclusive sense.”
When inclusion becomes exclusion

"It is surely wrong when an over-insistence on inclusion turns, in reality, into isolation and exclusion.”  Alison McInnes MSP, during the Camphill debate in the Scottish Parliament.

Norwegian teachers’ delegation visits Camphill School Aberdeen

Aberdeen is used to having close ties with Stavanger, in Norway, as the two leading European centres for the oil and gas industry.

But, another link across the North Sea was forged when an enthusiastic group of 49 special teachers from Stavanger’s Jaataa school visited Camphill School Aberdeen as part of their in-service training.

Jaataa School is a further education academy/college that supports around 55 students who have additional support needs.

The Jaataa teachers chose Camphill School Aberdeen because some of the staff had visited in 2002 and had fond memories of the impressive craft workshops, beautiful grounds and also of sharing meals with pupils and co-workers in the house-communities.

The visitors participated in presentations and discussions about the similar issues faced by the two schools.

The group also toured the school’s Murtle and Camphill campuses.

“It was lovely to meet such a positive and enthusiastic group of teachers”, said Mari Sterten, who played host to the event. “They confirmed my belief that humour and a ‘go’ outlook is a mark of our profession! Such a trip is excellent team-building for a group of colleagues.”

Mari reports that the presentation, on autism and sensory issues, by Camphill School Aberdeen education co-ordinator Bernhard Menzinger was particularly thought-provoking, with the visitors saying that they found it really excellent.

“They were also impressed by the greenhouse being created by recycling plastic bottles, and also rather taken by the wellbeing suite with space for, among other things, therapeutic baths, massage, and play therapy.”

They also had a presentation by crafts master Henriette Wormstall, showing the value of crafts and of learning to use one’s hands for personal growth and development.

During their tour of the campuses, the visitors met with pupils busy in the gardens, at work in the sculpture workshop and some of the younger pupils enjoying riding and working with the donkeys.

A £6,100 donation, handed over by members of the St Fittick Rotary in Aberdeen, will enable ten vulnerable local children to benefit from the pioneering Nature Nurture programme.

Donation will help improve lives of ten children

The donation came from Wilson Family Charitable Trust, which was set up in memory of long-standing St Fittick Rotary Club member Sandy Wilson, of William Wilson Ltd.

The donation was handed over by David Ritchie, Leann Duffy, Alastair Robertson, Sheena Anderson and Steve Williams of St Fittick Rotary.

They are pictured with Nature Nurture project co-ordinators Terri and Daniel Harrison and some of the children who will benefit.

The school is an example of Social Pedagogy in Practice. Care, education, therapy and creative activities are integrated. Relationships and social interaction, based on mutual care and respect, promote healthy development and resilience, with physical and emotional wellbeing.
In the seven-plus years that I have been working and living at Camphill School Aberdeen I have seen us developing, maintaining and improving our work with children and young people. One of our recent developments has been our Home School Support (run through our St Andrew’s Project) and more specific working with children and young people in their home environment.

I got involved in a story of a young man, aged 15, whom I will call David, and who made me change my way of thinking.

David is a shy, well-built, warm and friendly young man who lives with his mum in the middle of nowhere. He has been diagnosed with autism, amongst other issues. The main thing is that he has not attended any school for over a year and has been sitting on the sofa at home, for over nine months!

"The refurbished tools are put into separate toolboxes to be sent to woodworkers, metalworkers, leatherworkers, bike repairers, and mechanics, in Africa," explains Steven, one of Camphill school’s young people.

"The people who get the kits also get trained to use them in their workshops. We raised funds for this in the Advent Sale."

"The money from selling the scrap metal went towards shipping the toolkits."

"One thing I learned was that something which looks old and rusty or broken, can be given a new life with a little bit of elbow grease, or sanding or work. It can really help someone to make their life better."

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Initially I was quite reluctant to engage in this project as I had doubts about its cost efficiency and because it was new territory for me. Once I got over these hurdles and went for a first visit, my opinion changed dramatically.

I met a friendly, warm-hearted, humorous young man, just like I have met so often within our grounds. The only difference was that this young man was not able (yet) to move.

On our first visit I think we overwhelmed him with questions. But, within a week or so, I could already see a small change. He was, for example, waiting for us at the window to quickly move back to the sofa once he spotted us. It must have been quite extraordinary for him as he saw about seven different nationalities within a week. That’s Camphill for you!

Working therapeutically, or meaningfully, in someone’s home setting is different from at the school, but also more straightforward and less complex at times. If I walk in and the TV is on we can chat about what is on or just sit and watch. One gets quite creative in a small space and picks up easily what works and what does not.

The other day I decided to take along a card game (UNO) as I thought that might be nice to play (we are there one hour a day at present). What I did not anticipate is how such a game could turn into a therapeutic session wherein I saw David smiling, grinning, swearing, giggling, shouting, cheering and jumping (off the sofa!) for joy.

Herein I recognised so much of the basic needs of lots of youngsters I worked with – to belong, to be involved and to have fun in life! I hope these sessions can contribute to David’s ability to move himself from the sofa and to re-explore the world out there, just as I did when visiting him.

The embodiment of whole-life learning

“Camphill schools have, for a long time now, been at the forefront of providing innovative and holistic support for children with complex special needs.”

Maureen Watt, MSP for Aberdeen South and North Kincardine.
“What concerns me is the lack of recognition of the benefits of this approach by statutory authorities and the significant difficulties that parents, in particular, can face in securing funding from local authorities for residential care or education of this nature. Parents tell me that it can be such a battle, and it is often only when things are at breaking point that funding is agreed.” Alison McInnes MSP in the Scottish Parliament, introducing the motion on Camphill.

Aiden wins silver medal
Congratulations to Camphill School Aberdeen pupil Aiden (15), pictured with the silver medal he won at the Scottish Junior Championships for swimmers with a learning disability.

Three Camphill school swimmers took part in the championships – Aiden, Ryan (14), and Rohan (16). A fourth qualifier, Callum (16), was unable to attend the gala.

“It is inspiring to see the youngsters putting so much effort into swimming and improving with practice,” says Betty Marx, a teacher at Camphill School Aberdeen.

The School We’d Like
Camphill School Aberdeen achieved remarkable success in reaching the semi-final of the Guardian Teacher Network and Zurich Municipal national competition – the only school for children and young people with additional support needs in Scotland to do so.

At the semi-final in Newcastle two pupils, CJ and Daniel, led a presentation, entitled ‘Beyond the Classroom’, which highlighted how Camphill uses the natural environment to support learning.

Teacher Aksana Baikova said: “It has been a great experience for the two boys travelling all the way to Newcastle in the train and then presenting in front of a large audience at the Life Science Centre. They were very brave!” Although reaching the final proved beyond them the judges recommended that the school try again next year as they were very close!

Commissioner’s visit
Tam Baillie, Scotland’s Commissioner for Children and Young People, visited Camphill School Aberdeen earlier this year.

“The main part of my visit consisted of meeting with Klae, Harrison, CJ and Callum who filled me in on life in the school and their views on what makes Camphill special to them.”

Break a leg
There was no time for stage fright for two Camphill School Aberdeen pupils. Callum (16) and Klae (17) took to the stage for a week’s run of Culter Theatre Club’s ‘Beauty and the Beast’.

“I cannot believe that I am actually in the panto,” Callum said at the time. “I am so happy to be part of it.”

Flying the Eco-School Green Flag
Anyone who has visited Camphill School Aberdeen in recent months will have seen the pristine Eco-Schools Green Flags flying proudly on each campus, with good reason.

The new Eco-Schools green flags mark the achievement of the Eco Committee of the school’s pupil council who worked so hard over a two year period to achieve the Eco-Schools gold standard.

The Eco-Schools programme is an international initiative to encourage schools to take action to protect the environment.

In the last Network newsletter we reported on the Eco Committee’s clean-up of the old Deeside railway line, which was just one of the more visible examples of the programme.

But the Eco Committee’s efforts were aimed at changing lifestyles and changing our attitudes to consider the environment. The message is that lots of small changes can make a big difference.

The Camphill School Aberdeen 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

Pictured above, the new Eco-Schools Green Flag is unfurled by Karen Johnston of the Friends of Camphill School Aberdeen with Callum, Chair of the Pupil Council.

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