

Introduction from the Principal

The history of The Sheiling Ringwood dates back to 1951 when Sheiling School started as the second Camphill Community in the UK. The Camphill movement was founded by an Austrian Jewish GP, Dr Karl König, who came to Scotland from Vienna around 1939 following Hitler's invasion of Austria. Dr König had an inspiration about creating communities in which children with special needs could live and learn alongside co-workers. At the time of the Second World War, it was generally accepted that children with special needs could not be educated and therefore his idea of building schools through the formation of intentional life-sharing communities was seen as radical at that time.

The Camphill movement grew over the years through the creation of colleges and villages for those adults who needed a sheltered environment in which to live. Currently, there are over 100 centres in many different countries all over the world. The original pillars of a Camphill Community have changed over the years. For many years, the co-workers in each community were contributing to the life of students as part of a 'lifestyle'; this meant that they did not receive a salary, nor did they have a job description. The ideal was that 'each person contributes their part to the whole of the community and, in return, their day-to-day needs were met'. Life was shared with the students in the houses, having meals, celebrating festivals and accessing education in the school buildings adjacent to the houses. The easiest way to picture this time of the Sheiling is to see it as a small village, where many activities took place and people knew each other very well, thus creating a safe place for the children to develop and thrive.

As with any other organisation with high ideals, transformation over time is inevitable and this is the same for the Sheiling. Over the past 15 years or so, there has been a move away from co-worker status to employment of staff in all areas of the organisation. This was also aspired towards because the students seeking placements at the Sheiling were of a complex nature and, from a safeguarding perspective, it was felt appropriate that staff have a break from the often intense work with the students.

However, it is my view that the ethos comprises aspects of a Camphill Community where the individual – both students and staff – experience a sense of belonging, by contributing and sharing the varied tasks of living and learning, celebrating the festivals and seasons. Rudolf Steiner's view of the human being and its development stand at the centre of our approaches and attitudes. It is important for staff to be open and interested in the many different ways in which the ethos manifests itself including through the festivals, the curriculum and the therapies.

The Sheiling is celebrating its 75th anniversary in 2026; this history, and our unique ethos, make the Sheiling a very special place for our students and staff. Many parents and visitors comment upon a special feeling that is present at the Sheiling; something which is not always easy to put in words. I am very pleased to welcome you to the Sheiling as a new trustee and I welcome any questions you may have.

Corine van Barneveld

Principal