

Friends Centre for Adult Education

Inspection report

Unique reference number: 51905

Name of lead inspector: Jo Parkman HMI

Last day of inspection: 27 November 2009

Type of provider: Independent learning provider

Address: Brighton Junction
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Information about the provider

1. Friends Centre for Adult Education (Friends Centre) is an independent adult education centre formally established by the Society of Friends in 1945 to provide adult learning in Brighton and Hove. There are now no legal or operational connections between the Society of Friends and Friends Centre, though historical and personal links still exist between the two organisations.
2. Friends Centre offers a range of provision funded by Sussex Learning and Skills Council (LSC), with courses in nine subject areas. The provision comprises general adult education courses, literacy and numeracy programmes, and courses in English for speakers of other languages (ESOL). Community learning courses are provided through personal and community development learning (PCDL) funding. In addition to LSC-funded programmes, Friends Centre also hosts courses run by the Centre for Continuing Education at the University of Sussex. Additional funding for Friends Centre's literacy, numeracy and ESOL programmes comes from Brighton and Hove Council and European Social Funding. Friends Centre also offers advice and guidance through a nextstep contract. All of Friends Centre's provision is government funded.
3. At the time of the inspection the main learning site was at the Tarner Children's Centre, Ivory Place, where Friends Centre has four classrooms. However, Friends Centre was about to move to new premises offering more space and additional teaching rooms. Courses are provided in 18 other venues across Brighton and Hove, including neighbourhood learning centres, children's centres, libraries, community centres, primary schools, a mental health day centre, the city refuse depot and a sheltered workshop.
4. The Index of Multiple Deprivation 2004 lists Brighton as the second most deprived district in the south east. Educational attainment of school leavers is below average and some 15,700 residents of the city who are of working age have no qualifications.
5. The following organisation provides training on behalf of the provider:
 - Sussex Community Internet Project

Type of provision	Number of enrolled learners in 2008/09
Provision for young learners: Further education (16 to18)	11 part-time learners
Provision for adult learners: Further education (19+) Informal adult learning	470 part-time learners 606 part-time learners

Summary report

Grades: 1 is outstanding; 2 is good; 3 is satisfactory; 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness of provision	Grade 2
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Capacity to improve	Grade 2
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	Grade
Outcomes for learners	2
Quality of provision	2
Leadership and management	1
Safeguarding	2
Equality and diversity	1

Subject areas	Grade
Literacy, numeracy and ESOL	2
Community learning	2

Overall effectiveness

- The overall effectiveness of Friends Centre’s provision is good. Leaders and managers have a particularly strong vision and ambition for learners to succeed. Friends Centre makes exceptional use of its partnerships to develop programmes which meet the needs of the local community. It offers a particularly wide range of classes in literacy, numeracy and ESOL. The community learning courses are carefully matched to the interests of the local community and include many courses with a link to sustainability and care for the environment. Overall, Friends Centre demonstrates good capacity to improve the quality of its training programmes. The achievements of learners, and the standards of teaching and learning are good. Friends Centre provides good advice and guidance for its learners, and its care and support for their welfare is outstanding. Arrangements to safeguard learners are good and learners say they feel very safe and protected from abuse. Friends Centre’s arrangements for equality of opportunity are outstanding and include a strong emphasis on the promotion of tolerance and social justice.

Main findings

- Success rates on most accredited literacy, numeracy and ESOL courses are high. Overall, on courses at foundation level and below, the success rate in 2008/09 was some 11% above the national average. Although relatively few learners take qualifications at intermediate level, success rates for these learners are very high.
- Learners develop good skills on community learning and literacy, numeracy and ESOL courses. Learners enjoy their sessions and the standard of their work is good. The extent to which learners feel safe is good.
- Around three quarters of teaching sessions are good or outstanding. Teachers use a good range of activities and teaching materials. Learners participate enthusiastically and in the best sessions they work collaboratively, supporting and encouraging each other. However, teachers lack the confidence and skills needed to make the best use of information learning technology (ILT) to enhance learning.
- Targets for learners are not sufficiently individual. In many cases targets relate to outcomes for the whole group rather than being specific to individual learners. Where target setting is weaker, the evaluation of learners' achievements through the system for recognising and recording progress and achievement (RARPA) is less effective.
- The curriculum is outstandingly well matched to learners' needs. Literacy, numeracy and ESOL classes are offered at every level, from below foundation to intermediate, to provide good opportunities for progression and to ensure that the needs of all learners can be met. The community learning curriculum now includes many non-traditional classes, with a strong emphasis on sustainability and care of the environment.
- Friends Centre forms and uses partnerships exceptionally well. Close collaborative relationships have been developed with many community groups and Friends Centre plays a key role in ensuring that Skills for Life courses are available across the whole of the Brighton and Hove area. Strong links with community groups have resulted in many successful projects to engage learners and build the coherence and capacity of the local community.
- Advice, guidance and support for learners are good. Initial advice and guidance is provided effectively, including through the nextstep contract. However, the monitoring of learners' progression to other training after completing their courses is less well developed. Care and support for learners' welfare is outstanding.
- Friends Centre has a particularly strong vision and priorities. The principal has ensured that Friends Centre continues to provide learning opportunities for people from disadvantaged backgrounds while meeting the LSC's and the government's priorities. The board of trustees are challenging and committed to ensuring that Friends Centre achieves its goals, adheres to its original mission, and keeps pace with a changing educational world.

- The arrangements for safeguarding are good. Safeguarding is a particularly high priority and Friends Centre has taken a whole-organisational approach to implementing its safeguarding policy and procedures. Staff are particularly proactive in assessing risks and taking actions to minimise them. Friends Centre has an impressive record of listening to, and acting upon, learners' concerns.
- The arrangements for equality of opportunity are outstanding. Friends Centre is particularly successful at encouraging participation and meeting learners' individual needs to help them to achieve. Managers assess the impact of actions taken for equality and diversity and set, and meet, challenging targets for participation and success. The range of programmes offered is planned to ensure that it is strongly educationally and socially inclusive.
- Friends Centre has particularly successful arrangements for engaging with users to improve the training it offers. It actively seeks the views of different groups, with a particular emphasis on those who are not currently attending the training programmes offered.
- Self-assessment is particularly effective. Friends Centre has a highly inclusive approach to self-assessment, actively seeking the views of all staff and learners. The development plan is comprehensive, realistic and ambitious. However, there is too little use of the results of observations of teaching and learning to develop strategies to improve the proportion of outstanding teaching and learning.

What does Friends Centre need to do to improve further?

- Make better use of observations of teaching and learning to develop strategies to further increase the proportion of outstanding teaching. Develop arrangements to identify and share good practice in teaching.
- Develop the arrangements for RARPA to ensure a more robust evaluation of learners' achievement on courses which do not lead to qualifications. Ensure that targets set for learners include some that are individual to the learner rather than just outcomes for the group as a whole.
- Improve teachers' confidence and skills in the use of ILT to enhance learning.

Summary of the views of learners as confirmed by inspectors

What learners like:

- the friendly and encouraging learning atmosphere
- the flexibility of teachers, who adapt their teaching to suit the class
- the prospectus and website, which are both easy to use and understand
- the good support and high quality crèche facilities
- small, safe, friendly centres to learn in.

What learners would like to see improved:

- the number and length of classes offered
- the financial assistance available for courses other than Skills for Life
- the availability of places at the crèches.

Main inspection report

Capacity to make and sustain improvement

Grade 2

7. Friends Centre has good capacity to improve. Leaders and staff have a particularly strong vision for the centre, ambitious goals and clear strategic objectives. Success rates on accredited Skills for Life courses have been above national averages for the last two years. Managers and staff work very hard to identify any areas for improvement and are committed to making changes where necessary to bring about improvements. The self-assessment report is a particularly accurate appraisal of the quality of Friends Centre's provision. Self-assessment leads to a coherent and comprehensive plan for quality improvement. Friends Centre listens and responds to its learners particularly well and the training offered is a direct result of its consultations with them. Friends Centre's response to learners' concerns is outstanding. Staff are well qualified and experienced and the proportion of good or better teaching and learning is increasing each year.

Outcomes for learners

Grade 2

8. Success rates on most literacy, numeracy and ESOL courses which lead to qualifications are high. Overall, on courses at foundation level or below, the success rate in 2008/09 was some 11% above the national average. Although relatively few learners take qualifications at intermediate level, success rates for these learners are very high. For the 17 learners who took qualifications at intermediate level in 2008/09, the success rate was 94%, some 22% above the national average. No differences exist between the outcomes for different groups of learners.
9. Retention on community learning courses is high and has improved steadily over the last three years. The arrangements for RARPA are not yet robust enough to allow accurate judgements to be made about the achievements of learners on courses which do not lead to qualifications.
10. Learners develop good skills on community learning and literacy, numeracy and ESOL courses. Learners are enthusiastic about their learning and enjoy their sessions. The standard of their work is good and much community learning work is displayed prominently in the centre. Teachers pay good attention to health and safety and ensure that learners use safe working practices. The extent to which learners feel safe is good.

The quality of provision

Grade 2

11. Overall around three quarters of teaching sessions are good or outstanding. Teachers use a good range of activities and teaching materials. Learners participate enthusiastically and in the best sessions they work collaboratively, supporting and encouraging each other. Teaching resources are good and

many teaching rooms are equipped with interactive whiteboards. However, teachers lack the confidence and skills needed to make the best use of ILT to enhance learning.

12. Targets for learners are not sufficiently individual and do not always capture each learner's goals and aspirations. In many cases targets relate to outcomes for the whole group rather than being specific to individual learners. Where target setting is weaker, the monitoring and evaluation of learners' achievements through RARPA is less effective.
13. The extent to which courses meet learners' needs is outstanding. Literacy, numeracy and ESOL classes are offered at every level, from below foundation to intermediate level, and at many different locations. The range of courses provides excellent opportunities for progression and ensures that the needs of all learners can be met. The community learning curriculum has been developed carefully using the results of consultation with the local community. It now includes many non-traditional classes, with a strong emphasis on sustainability and care of the environment. Substantial numbers of new learners are recruited each year.
14. Friends Centre forms and uses partnerships exceptionally well to develop its provision to meet learners' needs. Close collaborative relationships have been developed with many community groups and Friends Centre plays a key role in ensuring that Skills for Life courses are available across the whole of the Brighton and Hove area. Strong links with community groups have resulted in many successful projects to engage learners and build the coherence and capacity of the local community.
15. Advice, guidance and support for learners are good. Initial advice and guidance is provided effectively, including through the nextstep contract. Staff are helpful and knowledgeable and go to great lengths to provide potential learners with accurate and useful information about the courses offered. Course information is largely very informative and helps learners to choose appropriately. Few learners fail to complete their courses. Care and support for learners' welfare are outstanding. However, the monitoring of learners' progression to other training after completing their courses is less well developed.

Leadership and management

Grade 1

16. Friends Centre has a particularly strong vision and priorities which are understood by all of its staff and partners. The principal has ensured that Friends Centre maintains its original purpose of providing learning opportunities for people from disadvantaged backgrounds while meeting both the LSC's and the government's priorities. The trustees, together with the principal, are highly knowledgeable about regional and local skills and development strategies. Trustees form a highly effective supervisory board. They are challenging and committed to ensuring that Friends Centre achieves its goals, adheres to its original mission and keeps pace with a changing educational world.

17. The arrangements for safeguarding are good. Safeguarding is a particularly high priority and Friends Centre has taken a whole-organisational approach to implementing its safeguarding policy and procedures. All staff have received appropriate vetting checks and a central record is maintained carefully. Staff are particularly proactive in assessing risks and taking actions to minimise them. Friends Centre has an impressive record of listening to, and acting upon, learners' concerns. Detailed records are kept of any concerns or anxieties raised by learners or staff, including actions taken. Staff refer learners effectively to specialist agencies for support and help and check carefully that difficulties have been resolved.
18. The arrangements for equality of opportunity are outstanding. Friends Centre is particularly successful at encouraging participation and meeting learners' individual needs to allow them to achieve. Careful targeting of marketing and selection of venues for training have led to high participation from minority groups. Friends Centre has worked hard to develop the confidence of local community groups and to provide safe venues for training. Managers assess the impact of actions taken for equality and diversity and set, and meet, challenging targets for participation and success.
19. The range of programmes offered is planned to ensure that it is strongly educationally and socially inclusive. In many cases, learners have first participated in taster or leisure courses and in doing so developed the confidence to continue on to literacy, numeracy and ESOL courses which lead to qualifications. Friends Centre has continued to support training at venues which initially attracted only very small groups of learners, who attended erratically. However, over time many of these groups have grown into stable community groups which have developed the confidence to take advantage of other opportunities offered both by Friends Centre and other training providers.
20. Friends Centre provides very good support for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Around a quarter of all learners on community learning courses have a declared learning difficulty and/or disability. The support offered includes specialist equipment. Many classes have support workers to assist the teacher and make sure that learners with particular needs receive the help they need to succeed.
21. Friends Centre has particularly successful arrangements for engaging with users to improve the training it offers. It actively seeks the views of different groups, with a particular emphasis on those who are not currently attending the training programmes offered. Friends Centre makes sure that responses to feedback are communicated effectively and learners appreciate the effort Friends Centre makes to include them in planning and developing the provision.
22. Self-assessment is good. Friends Centre has a highly inclusive approach to self-assessment, actively seeking the views of all staff and learners. The development plan is comprehensive, realistic and ambitious. It includes appropriate actions for both addressing areas for improvement and developing strengths. Monitoring arrangements are particularly effective and include a

thorough review of progress, which takes place at the end of the year to contribute to the next self-assessment. However, too little use is made of the results of observations of teaching and learning to develop strategies to improve the proportion of outstanding teaching and learning.

23. With rising success rates, outstanding arrangements for listening to the views of learners, exceptional use of partnerships for sharing resources and a strong emphasis on sustainability, Friends Centre provides outstanding value for money. The move to new premises has been managed very well to make maximum use of the expertise of the trustees and ensure a timely and efficient move. Financial planning is very good and Friends Centre manages its resources particularly well.

Subject areas

Literacy, numeracy and ESOL

Grade 2

Context

24. Currently, 422 learners are on literacy, numeracy or ESOL programmes. Around two thirds are studying ESOL, 64 are on numeracy courses and the remaining 86 are on literacy courses. All learners are studying part-time. Courses are offered from below foundation level to intermediate level, and range from two to seven and a half hours a week. The majority of learners are working at below foundation level. Most of the learners are offered the opportunity to gain Skills for Life qualifications.

Key findings

- Success rates on most literacy, numeracy and ESOL courses which lead to qualifications are high. Overall, on courses at foundation level or below, the success rate in 2008/09 was some 11% above the national average. For the 17 learners who took qualifications at intermediate level in 2008/09, the success rate was 94%. No differences exist between the achievements for different groups of learners.
- Retention rates are high but the arrangements for RARPA are insufficiently robust to ensure an accurate evaluation of learners' achievements. About 30% of learners are on courses below foundation level which do not lead to qualifications.
- Progression between the different levels of courses offered is good. However, Friends Centre recognises that its arrangements for monitoring progression to other courses at Friends Centre or to courses offered by other training providers are less well developed.
- Learners do not always attend regularly. Friends Centre has developed several strategies to improve attendance, including text messaging and phone calls, and these are now beginning to lead to improvements.
- Learners develop a good range of skills. Many improve not only their literacy, language, and numeracy skills, but also their employability and social skills. Learners greatly improve their confidence and contribute well and enthusiastically in sessions. The standard of their work is good. Learners make good progress during sessions and their newly acquired skills contribute well to improving their economic and social well-being.
- Learners feel safe and an effective induction programme includes a good focus on the importance of health and safety. Friends Centre offers courses at venues to which learners can easily travel, and where they feel safe.
- Teaching and learning are good. Teachers create an enjoyable and purposeful learning environment. They plan sessions well and choose relevant topics, such as visiting the doctor in ESOL sessions, to capture learners' interest. Teachers use a good range of activities and materials and ensure that all learners

participate. They use successful strategies to meet the diverse needs of learners of differing abilities within the groups.

- Teachers carry out initial and diagnostic assessments satisfactorily and ensure that they have an accurate analysis of individual learners' needs. They use a good variety of assessment techniques and assess learners frequently.
- The targets set for learners are insufficiently individual. Too often targets are set as outcomes for the whole group. Learners tend to record the work they have completed in sessions as opposed to evaluating and recording their learning. Where targets are insufficiently individual it is difficult for teachers and learners to evaluate the progress they have made during the course.
- Teachers make insufficient use of ILT in sessions. They do not have sufficient confidence or skills to use the ILT equipment available effectively. Too often ILT is simply used to display handouts rather than as an interactive tool for learning.
- Friends Centre makes exceptional use of partnerships to develop its provision. Collaborative work has led to very effective joint planning for Skills for Life provision and the new approach to ESOL for Brighton. This productive partnership work, including innovative projects, has helped to attract learners from hard-to-reach local communities.
- Teachers, volunteers, support workers and front line staff provide very good support for learners. Learners greatly appreciate the care and concern for their welfare and individual needs.
- Communication and operational management are good. Approachable managers keep staff well informed through formal and informal meetings. The monitoring of performance of both sessional and permanent staff is good and includes effective appraisals and staff development. Teachers' use of data is good. Staff feel fully involved in the self-assessment process and the report is highly accurate and perceptive.
- A strong and inclusive culture focused on equality and diversity is evident in Centre. Staff pay particular attention to adapting provision to meet the diverse needs of learners and this is a key strength of the provision. The promotion of equality and diversity is good and teachers choose topics and teaching materials which reflect the cultural diversity of the groups.
- The monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. Overall, the findings and grades awarded at observations are accurate. However, there is insufficient focus on identifying actions to further improve the quality of teaching and learning and to increase the amount of good and outstanding teaching.

What does Friends Centre need to do to improve further?

- Provide teachers with appropriate training and guidance in setting targets for learners to ensure that they include individual as well as group targets. Ensure that the targets set allow an accurate evaluation of learners' progress and achievements.

- Continue to develop, implement and monitor strategies to improve attendance rates.
- Introduce opportunities for teachers to identify and share good practice in teaching, including the effective use of ILT to enhance learning.

Community learning

Grade 2

Context

25. Currently, 334 learners are on community learning courses. Friends Centre offers short, daytime and evening courses in creative arts, sport, information technology, modern foreign languages, creative writing, and complementary health. Courses are run in various community venues and at the Friends Centre. About a quarter of learners have a declared learning difficulty and/or disability.

Key findings

- Learners develop good practical skills and confidence during their courses. On creative arts and writing courses, learners demonstrate good drawing, musical or writing skills. In Tai Chi classes older learners develop good strategies to improve or maintain their health and mobility.
- Retention rates are high and the vast majority of learners complete their courses. Learners enjoy their learning activities and appreciate the friendly learning environment created by Friends Centre. Attendance is satisfactory.
- Teachers pay good attention to health and safety and ensure that learners use safe working practices. In Tai Chi and yoga classes, teachers have a very good understanding of their learners' abilities and difficulties and adapt their teaching effectively to suit individual needs so that learners stay safe.
- Teaching and learning are good. Courses are well planned with clear links between sessions. On many courses, learners enjoy helping each other and seek feedback from their teachers and peers. On creative arts and writing courses, teachers give particularly effective and timely advice and guidance to learners. On these courses, learning materials are well researched and presented.
- Assessment is satisfactory. Teachers know their learners' abilities and needs well. However, too often formal assessment relies almost entirely on learners' own self-assessment against targets set for the whole group. Teachers do not ensure that learners identify and set individual targets which reflect their goals and reasons for joining the course.
- Teachers do not use ILT sufficiently or appropriately to enhance learning. For example, when equipment is available in the classroom, it is either rarely used or its use not sufficiently well prepared.
- The courses offered fully meet the needs of the local community. Friends Centre offers a good range of courses in all six subject areas, with good progression routes. The courses offered are particularly effective at attracting new and hard-to-reach learners. Nearly half of current learners are new to learning. Numbers of learners continue to grow and very few courses are cancelled because of a lack of enrolments.

- Learners receive good information, advice and support. Managers and teachers provide effective pre-course information. Learners have good access to impartial advice and guidance and financial support. On creative arts courses, free equipment and materials are available for learners, and learners on a music course are able to take instruments home to allow them to practise.
- Managers use data well to monitor and review performance and adjust programmes. Teachers feel very well supported and have good opportunities for staff development. Teachers are suitably qualified and have good expertise in their subjects. Safeguarding arrangements are good.
- Equality and diversity are promoted very well. Teachers create a welcoming and safe learning environment. Courses are offered at venues which are easy for learners to reach and where learners feel confident and safe. Teaching materials promote diversity well.
- Managers have substantially revised the arrangements for quality improvement. The observation of teaching and learning is now robust, with subject-specialist observers and an increased focus on learning. However, good practice is not always sufficiently identified and shared. Observations do not always result in actions likely to improve the proportion of outstanding teaching. Self-assessment is robust, thorough, inclusive and accurate.

What does Friends Centre need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that learners work towards clear and measurable targets which reflect their goals and aspirations and allow accurate evaluation of their progression and achievements.
- Provide better training and support for teachers in the use of ILT so that teachers have the necessary skills and confidence to make better use of the available technology to enhance learning.
- Introduce arrangements to identify and share good practice in teaching. Ensure that observations of teaching include the identification of actions to improve the proportion of outstanding teaching.

Information about the inspection

26. One of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and two additional inspectors, assisted by the provider's quality coordinator, as nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors also took account of the Friends Centre's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, comments from the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC) or other funding bodies, the previous inspection report and data on learners and their achievement over the period since the previous inspection.
27. Inspectors used group and individual interviews and emails. They looked at questionnaires learners had recently completed on behalf of Friends Centre. They also observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. Inspectors collected evidence from programmes in two of the subject areas Friends Centre offers.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)
Friends Centre for Adult Education

Learning types: 14 – 16: Young apprenticeships; Diplomas; **16-18 Learner responsive:** FE full- and part-time courses, Foundation learning tier, including Entry to Employment; **19+ responsive:** FE full- and part-time courses; **Employer responsive:** Train to Gain, apprenticeships

Grades using the 4 point scale 1: Outstanding; 2: Good; 3: Satisfactory; 4: Inadequate	Overall	14-16	16-18 Learner responsive	19+ Learner responsive	Employer responsive
Approximate number of enrolled learners					
Full-time learners					
Part-time learners	756			756	
Overall effectiveness	2			2	
Capacity to improve	2				
Outcomes for learners	2			2	
How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning?	2				
How well do learners attain their learning goals?	2				
How well do learners progress?	2				
How well do learners improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development?	2				
How safe do learners feel?	2				
<i>Are learners able to make informed choices about their own health and well being?*</i>	2				
<i>How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*</i>	2				
Quality of provision	2			2	
How effectively do teaching, training and assessment support learning and development?	2				
How effectively does the provision meet the needs and interests of users?	1				
How well partnerships with schools, employers, community groups and others lead to benefits for learners?	1				
How effective are the care, guidance and support learners receive in helping them to achieve?	2				
Leadership and management	1			1	
How effectively do leaders and managers raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation?	1				
<i>How effectively do governors and supervisory bodies provide leadership, direction and challenge?*</i>	1				
How effectively does the provider promote the safeguarding of learners?	2				
How effectively does the provider actively promote equality and diversity, tackle discrimination and narrow the achievement gap?	1				
How effectively does the provider engage with users to support and promote improvement?	1				
How effectively does self-assessment improve the quality of the provision and outcomes for learners?	2				
How efficiently and effectively does the provider use its available resources to secure value for money?	1				

*where applicable to the type of provision

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