

# 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  
Isetta Square  
Stroudley Road  
Brighton  
BN1 4GQ

**Telephone number:** 01273 810210

## 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 Turner 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

<b>Type of provision</b>	<b>Number of enrolled learners in 2008/09</b>
<b>Provision for young learners:</b> Further education (16 to18)	11 part-time learners
<b>Provision for adult learners:</b> 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

<b>Overall effectiveness of provision</b>	<b>Grade 2</b>
---	----------------

<b>Capacity to improve</b>	<b>Grade 2</b>
----------------------------	----------------

	<b>Grade</b>
Outcomes for learners	2
Quality of provision	2
Leadership and management	1
Safeguarding	2
Equality and diversity	1

<b>Subject areas</b>	<b>Grade</b>
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.