

# Friends Centre

## Independent learning provider

<b>Inspection dates</b>		15-17 January 2014
<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>This inspection:</b>	<b>Requires improvement-3</b>
	Previous inspection:	Good-2
Outcomes for learners		Requires improvement-3
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment		Requires improvement-3
Effectiveness of leadership and management		Requires improvement-3

### Summary of key findings for learners

#### This provider requires improvement because:

- Not enough learners achieve their qualifications. Overall success rates on courses with national qualifications are below the national average, although they are higher for community and leisure learning.
- The attendance of learners is not good enough and this limits their progress and achievement.
- Teaching, learning and assessment are not yet consistently good. Tutors do not check sufficiently the progress of learners and they are not prepared well enough for their examinations.
- Target setting to improve the progress of learners is not precise. Targets to help learners improve their English and mathematics skills are not challenging or specific enough to help them to improve quickly.

#### This provider has the following strengths:

- Friends Centre is very welcoming and supportive to all learners, particularly those who experience disadvantage. It successfully brings learners from a wide range of backgrounds into learning and education in a harmonious and respectful atmosphere.
- It works very effectively with the community and has built highly successful partnerships locally that benefit learners, providing suitable opportunities for learning and improving their skills within their community and their job prospects.
- It provides excellent care and support to learners, who respond positively to the encouragement they receive. Learners work well with each other and this helps them to complete their courses.
- Tutors are skilled at identifying barriers to learning and using successful strategies that enable learners to improve their confidence and skills, and make progress in learning.

## Full report

### What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Improve attendance by ensuring that tutors and staff set clear expectations to learners about punctuality and attendance at the start of their courses and reinforce the importance of attending regularly. Introduce effective systems for rewarding and encouraging attendance.
- Improve teaching, learning and assessment by ensuring that tutors:
  - help learners to improve their own study skills
  - agree clear, precise and measurable targets with learners and monitor their individual learning plans regularly
  - assess and record learners' progress systematically
  - take the opportunities that arise in lessons to widen learners' understanding of equality and diversity more consistently in lessons.
- Put in place a more rigorous process for monitoring and formally recording the assessment and progress of learners.
- Improve pass rates and achievements of English and mathematics functional skills by reviewing current practice and introducing more suitable courses and how these are taught.
- Train more tutors to observe and accurately evaluate teaching, learning and assessment so that good practices can be shared and improvements made quickly.

### Inspection judgements

Outcomes for learners	Requires improvement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Friends Centre effectively helps local people to improve their lives through education and training. Learners, many of whom face disadvantages, acquire valuable communication and language skills that improve their ability to progress in learning, training and into employment. They improve their self-confidence and team-working skills.</li> <li>▪ The pass rates of a minority of learners in mathematics and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) courses for the last two years have been lower than national averages and require improvement. Although learners enjoy their courses and are happy studying with Friends Centre, not enough gain their qualifications. Suitable actions taken to remedy this, such as providing bridging courses to develop essential knowledge and understanding, have not yet had sufficient impact.</li> <li>▪ Learners on leisure and recreational courses are more successful in achieving their targets. Outcomes are also higher on courses designed to get individuals into learning and improve their employability skills.</li> <li>▪ The capability of learners to improve their everyday skills in mathematics and English has been limited by ineffective monitoring of their progress. Additionally, higher level qualifications introduced too quickly did not benefit all learners. These shortcomings are reflected in the low achievement rates in the examinations for English and mathematics.</li> <li>▪ Attendance during the inspection was low and has been low over the year. Tutors contact learners promptly when they are absent to find out the reasons and prevent a pattern of absences. They also provide appropriate support quickly. However, not all tutors sufficiently reinforce the centre's expectations about the importance of attending classes regularly, and the consequences of not attending. The reasons for non-attendance offered by learners are at times too readily accepted.</li> </ul>	

- The standard of learners' work is good. The very positive and caring help of tutors encourages learners to produce thoughtful and imaginative work. Learners frequently produce additional, resourceful work that exemplifies their interest. This is a strong and positive feature of the general leisure and recreational courses. Many learners, through working in small groups, develop good social skills and produce creative community projects such as an imaginative garden scheme.
- Learners develop appropriate job-seeking and interview skills from good practical workshops that instil the importance of positive attitudes and presenting themselves effectively. For example, additional mentoring has helped ESOL learners with their speaking. They respond well to, and benefit from, the positive and respectful ethos in the centres and the coaching and personal attention of tutors.
- There are no significant differences in the achievement of learners from different backgrounds. Learners with difficulties and/or disabilities perform in line with other learners. Managers routinely collate information about learners' backgrounds and how the learners perform.
- Current learners are making reasonable progress from low starting points and situations of disadvantage. A high proportion of learners progress onto suitable further courses with Friends Centre. However, managers currently do not assess the impact on those who move into employment or higher levels of education and training.

<b>The quality of teaching, learning and assessment</b>	Requires improvement
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- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment has not improved the outcomes for learners sufficiently and requires improvement. Well-qualified tutors enable learners of all abilities to engage in, and enjoy, learning. In ESOL classes, for example, learners question each other with great enthusiasm about their likes and dislikes in 'race against time' exercises which form the basis for developing their skills in how they use questions in different situations.
- Tutors are skilled at identifying the barriers to learning experienced by learners. They devise successful strategies to enable learners to participate well in lessons, particularly in their use of volunteers, many of whom are appropriately qualified to teach. They skilfully provide sensitive and individual support to those learners who need extra help. This careful attention has a positive effect on improving the confidence of learners, especially those learning new skills or who lack confidence as is the case in mathematics classes.
- Planning for learning is well considered and careful. It provides a clear structure to lessons and is based on the needs and differing abilities of learners. However, in lessons which are not effective, tutors do not organise their time well enough between activities. For example, learners often do not have sufficient time to practise and consolidate skills or knowledge.
- Friends Centre's most effective tutors routinely develop learners' understanding through using thoughtful, lively and engaging questions and answers. For example, in successful ESOL lessons, learners recall and use previously learnt information or technical skills and apply them to new tasks and situations such as having to explain what an Ofsted inspection is.
- The progress learners make is not good enough in a few lessons. In these lessons tutors do not check regularly enough whether learners have understood information and instructions. Additionally, in a few lessons, tutors answer their own questions before giving learners sufficient time to reflect and answer, or ask follow-up questions.
- In foundation English and mathematics courses, assessment of learners' needs at the start of their courses is thorough and correctly identifies their levels of learning. This ensures that learners are on appropriate courses and provides tutors with a detailed profile of each learner's needs. However, in general adult and leisure courses where tutors manage the assessment at the first point of contact, assessment is often less rigorous.
- Targets for learners set after reviewing early progress are often not specific enough to enable effective measurement of progress towards their achievement. For example, some learners in

English had a target of 'improve spelling' without further detail, and in ESOL a few learners had a target to 'communicate with English people' with no additional explanation.

- On adult and leisure courses, tutors accurately record activities and topics studied in individual learning plans, but these do not give a clear enough assessment of learning and progress. Learners self-assess their skills at both the start and end of their courses in their individual learning plans, but tutors do not consistently carry out detailed formative assessments in between to enable learners to further improve their performance during their courses.
- The vast majority of learners benefit from the immediate verbal feedback they receive from tutors in lessons and during class discussions. The feedback is encouraging and supportive and helps them to develop their skills. For example, from positive feedback, learners make good progress in number recognition and basic multiplication skills, applying this in a range of activities such as shopping.
- Learners receive good support and help during their courses. They get timely individual attention and assistance that meet the wide range of their needs. This can be, for example, advice on personal issues, help to understand official forms and deal with financial problems and childcare when attending classes.
- The information and guidance learners receive before and during their courses are helpful, clear and timely. Specialist advisors give pre-employment support in writing curriculum vitae and job applications as well as guidance on progression to other education and training opportunities. As a result, learners become well informed and are able to make suitable choices on their next steps.
- Tutors provide safe and friendly learning environments and positively include all learners in their teaching. Friends Centre is particularly successful in attracting new learners into study and learning. The centre makes explicit its expectations and practices in relation to respect for diversity, anti-harassment and promoting equality. However, in lessons, tutors do not take opportunities that arise from topics they are teaching to stimulate thinking about equality matters, for example the benefits of living and studying within a remarkably diverse local community.

### **The effectiveness of leadership and management**

Requires improvement

- Trustees and leaders have a clear vision and strong commitment to providing equality of opportunity for the community and their learners. Against this setting and as a member of the Community Learning Trust, tutors work very successfully with very many learners from different backgrounds.
- Although there is a positive culture and commitment to improving outcomes for learners, actions taken to improve and ensure teaching and learning are consistently good have not been effective. Low attendance of learners, inconsistent and imprecise target setting for learners, and ineffective monitoring of their progress have undermined good practices, such as clear and focused assessment of learners' needs at the start of their courses.
- There has been a successful restructuring and managers have put in place a well-considered plan of action to improve pass rates, but the impact is not yet apparent. Tutors have been well supported internally through the changes but have not shared good practice enough or learned from the experience of others externally to enable them to implement changes in line with best practice. For example, the transition from key skills to English and mathematics functional skills did not lead to improved outcomes or experiences for learners.
- The system of lesson observations identifies strengths and areas for development accurately. However, grades given for lessons are less accurate because observers focus too often on teaching activities and do not assess the impact on the progress of learners. The observation of teaching and lessons is closely linked to the appraisal of tutors' performance in the classroom and identifies development points for individual tutors to improve their practice clearly, but these are not always implemented in a timely way.

- The staff development programme has improved the practices of tutors and support staff and benefited learners. For example, training in awareness of mental health, different lifestyles and equality and diversity has improved the understanding of staff in how they work with learners and contributed greatly to the inclusive and respectful atmosphere in all the venues.
- The system of self-assessment is well established. Although the self-assessment report assesses strengths and areas for improvement accurately, the grades awarded are too optimistic. It uses data and the views of learners in its self-evaluation objectively. However, its evaluation of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and how this can be improved does not give sufficient detail. Managers monitor actions for improvement arising from the self-assessment closely and regularly make adjustments when needed.
- Trustees provide supportive and appropriate scrutiny and challenge to leaders and managers. They have a good understanding of the strengths and the challenges that face Friends Centre. They demonstrate a clear and unequivocal lead on the values and mission to help learners achieve their aspirations and meet the challenges they face.
- The programmes and partnerships of Friends Centre meet the needs of the local community very successfully. They offer excellent opportunities to engage people who need extra help and support to start learning and improve their prospects. Friends Centre engages new learners with few formal educational qualifications by taking an active role across Brighton in working with other providers, voluntary organisations, charities and volunteer groups. Learners are positive about their experiences and their views are routinely collected through surveys and used informatively to develop the curriculum.
- The venues where Friends Centre operates are inclusive, welcoming environments where learners from many different backgrounds feel welcomed and safe. Learners do not experience harassment or bullying and are very respectful of each other. Staff are very aware of health and safety issues and appropriate risk assessments are regularly carried out. Safeguarding arrangements meet statutory requirements.

## Record of Main Findings (RMF)

### Friends Centre

Inspection grades are based on a provider's performance:  1: Outstanding 2: Good 3: Requires improvement 4: Inadequate	<b>Overall</b>	14-16 part-time provision	14-16 full-time provision	16-19 study programmes	Traineeships	19+ Learning programmes	Apprenticeships	Employability	Community learning
<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>3</b>	-	-	-	-	3	-	-	-
Outcomes for learners	<b>3</b>	-	-	-	-	3	-	-	-
The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	<b>3</b>	-	-	-	-	3	-	-	-
The effectiveness of leadership and management	<b>3</b>	-	-	-	-	3	-	-	-

Subject areas graded for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Grade
English for speakers of other languages (ESOL)	<b>3</b>

## Provider details

<b>Type of provider</b>	Independent learning provider							
<b>Age range of learners</b>	19+							
<b>Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year</b>	Full-time: N/A							
	Part-time: 586							
<b>Principal/CEO</b>	Ms Robyn Kohler							
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	27 November 2009							
<b>Website address</b>	www.friendscentre.org							
<b>Provider information at the time of the inspection</b>								
<b>Main course or learning programme level</b>	<b>Level 1 or below</b>		<b>Level 2</b>		<b>Level 3</b>		<b>Level 4 and above</b>	
<b>Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)</b>	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
<b>Full-time</b>	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Part-time</b>	1	178	3	113	-	-	-	-
<b>Number of traineeships</b>	16-19		19+		Total			
	-		-		-			
<b>Number of apprentices by Apprenticeship level and age</b>	<b>Intermediate</b>		<b>Advanced</b>		<b>Higher</b>			
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Number of learners aged 14-16</b>								
<b>Full-time</b>	N/A							
<b>Part-time</b>	N/A							
<b>Number of community learners</b>	295							
<b>Number of employability learners</b>	N/A							
<b>Funding received from</b>	Education Funding Agency and Skills Funding Agency							
<b>At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Not applicable</li> </ul>							

## Contextual information

Friends Centre is an independent adult education organisation and charity based in Brighton and Hove. It receives funding from the Skills Funding Agency and Education Funding Agency and is also supported by charitable donations from trusts and individuals. Its main centre is Brighton Junction. It also provides learning in many community venues across Brighton and Hove including neighbourhood learning centres, children's centres, libraries, community centres, primary schools, a mental health day centre, and a sheltered workshop. Friends Centre works in several areas of multiple deprivation in Brighton and Hove.

Friends Centre offers a range of adult learning, with courses in eight sector subject areas that cover general adult and leisure education as well as funded learning at foundation level. In partnership with a local college, it delivers initial teacher training in Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector (PTLLS.)

## Information about this inspection

**Lead inspector**

Peter Green HMI

Peter Green, one of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and two additional inspectors, assisted by the Curriculum Planning and Data Manager, and Quality Manager as nominees, carried out the inspection with short notice. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors also used data on learners' achievements over the last three years to help them make judgements. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of learners; these views are reflected throughout the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider. Inspectors looked at the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across the provision and graded the sector subject areas listed in the report above.



## What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement
Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Requires improvement
Grade 4	Inadequate

Detailed grade characteristics can be viewed in the *Handbook for the inspection of further education and skills 2012*, Part 2:

<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/handbook-for-inspection-of-further-education-and-skills-september-2012>

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