

Friends Centre

Independent learning provider

Inspection dates		10–12 June 2015
Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Requires improvement-3
	Previous inspection:	Requires improvement-3
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:

- leaders and managers at Friends Centre have not yet secured sufficient improvement in learners' success in gaining their qualifications and in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment
- teaching, learning and assessment are not yet leading to sufficiently good outcomes for learners, and their overall success in gaining their qualifications, especially in externally set examinations, is too low
- teachers do not always ensure that their teaching meets the needs of all learners, and do not always set them specific and sufficiently challenging learning goals to help them to achieve their full potential
- teachers' checking of learners' progress and understanding to help guide learners on their next steps is not consistently good
- the teaching and development of learners' English and mathematical skills, although improving, are not sufficiently or consistently effective.

This provider has the following strengths:

- learners often make good progress on their courses and attain their own personal learning goals
- since the previous inspection, leaders and managers have increased Friends Centre's capacity to improve, and are working well to establish fully rigorous quality and management arrangements to secure consistently good improvements
- learners are very well guided and supported on their courses; significantly more learners now complete their courses
- Friends Centre has excellent partnerships with organisations across the city, especially in the provision of adult learning to meet the needs of often disadvantaged learners
- learners study in an inclusive environment, where those from diverse backgrounds feel welcomed and safe.

Full report

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment to meet the needs of all learners. To do this, ensure that tutors provide: clearer targets to help learners to improve; more developmental written feedback to learners on the quality of their work; systematic, challenging opportunities for learners to extend their skills and knowledge to the full during sessions; more consistent and effective checks on learners' progress during sessions and in progress reviews; and better opportunities for learners to use information and learning technology (ILT), both in and out of sessions.
- Better develop learners' skills in English and mathematics by ensuring that tutors integrate these skills into activities in all sessions and, more specifically, provide systematic correction of English errors and the fostering of learners' use of mathematical skills on all courses.
- Embed further the improved arrangements for the management of the curriculum and the improvement of its quality; in particular, build on the best practice within Friends Centre to improve the quality of provision and outcomes for learners.
- To aid effective action planning for improvement, sharpen the focus of judgements in the self-assessment report, making it clear what is at the root of a strength or an area for improvement.
- Secure a fully realistic picture for leaders, managers and tutors of what needs improving in teaching, learning and assessment, by further improving the rigour of the Friends Centre scheme for the observation of teaching, learning and assessment.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for learners	Requires improvement
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- Friends Centre offers, in the main, short duration courses for adult learners, many of whom face significant disadvantages in their learning and lives. Courses are offered from pre-entry to level 2 in English, mathematics and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), as well as level 1 and 2 courses in the arts and information technology (IT), and level 2 courses in counselling and mental health awareness. The largest numbers of learners take community learning courses, in a wide range of subjects, not leading to externally-validated qualifications. Friends Centre also offers a significant number of courses for which learners pay the full cost and for which no public funding exists.
- Learners are well motivated, enjoy their studies and often attain their personal learning goals. Courses often provide them with a qualification for the first time in their lives. Learners develop their skills well and often apply them with their families, in the community and at work.
- Learners value the benefits of studying alongside others and are proud of their achievements. Many develop the confidence and enthusiasm to study further. Learners make sound progress, often from low starting points.
- In contrast to the findings of the previous inspection, most learners now complete their courses. An increasingly high proportion of learners progress to suitable further courses at Friends Centre. Significant numbers progress to courses at a higher level. Friends Centre carries out a telephone survey of former learners, which indicates worthwhile progression to other courses or to employment.
- The largest proportion of learners are on courses not leading to external qualifications, and these are the most successful in achieving their targets. Friends Centre's improving, and now largely reliable, systems for recording and recognising achievement show that overall success was good in 2013/14.

- In contrast, the proportion of the smaller, but significant, number of learners on courses leading to qualifications who successfully complete their courses is too low, although it is in line with that of other providers in similar areas. On a number of courses, including those in ESOL, the proportion of learners successfully completing in 2014/15 has improved well. Friends Centre's data predict improvement in achievement, for example in functional skills, ESOL and IT. Too much variation in learners' performance exists between subject areas. For example, while the overall success of the large number of learners in the arts is just above national rates for similar providers, it is significantly below for courses in English and mathematics.
- Functional skills courses in English and mathematics were introduced for all learners in 2013/14 and learners are now developing better skills than at the previous inspection. These improvements are not yet fully reflected in better achievement in examinations, but during 2014/15 more learners have achieved well.
- Friends Centre has made considerable progress in securing the better attendance of its learners. On many courses, attendance has improved significantly in 2014/15. It has particularly improved in ESOL and in English, for example.
- The standard of learners' work is often good, and tutors continue to work well to help learners to produce thoughtful and imaginative work; good work is particularly evident in the general leisure and recreational courses. Learners' skills in working in groups are well developed. Friends Centre continues with its positive work to help learners develop better job-seeking and interview skills, using practical workshops, offered through its National Careers Service contract, to increase confidence and improve self-presentation.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
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- Teaching, learning and assessment have improved since the previous inspection, but are not yet sufficiently improving outcomes for learners, especially on accredited courses. Tutors work well with their learners, motivate them and skilfully build trust. This helps learners to develop confidence and self-worth, and to contribute well in discussions.
- Learners benefit from working collaboratively and develop new and valuable skills. Learners on ESOL programmes enjoy paired activities to enhance confidence and communication skills. Those on English courses support each other well in preparing their curriculum vitae and in completing forms. On mathematics courses, learners build confidence in working out mathematical problems, a skill which is often very new to them. On general adult education courses, learners develop a good range of new skills and knowledge, such as how to use digital editing software, produce garments from patterns, and identify skills and qualities for life and work contexts. Tutors make good use of humour to stimulate learning.
- Teaching and learning are not consistently good or better. In the more successful sessions, tutors monitor progress well and systematically check on learners' knowledge. In these sessions, learners enjoy a good range of activities and extend their knowledge of the subject. However, in too many lessons, the more able learners do not benefit from extension activities to stretch and challenge them fully, and do not make the progress they are capable of achieving.
- Tutors' and learners' use of ILT requires improvement. Tutors do not make sufficient use of the interactive whiteboards available in the classrooms to stimulate activities and supplement paper-based materials. Learners' and tutors' use of the Friends Centre virtual learning environment remains underdeveloped on the large majority of courses, with too few resources used by learners for their independent learning.
- Tutors' use of target setting and reviews of progress with learners require improvement. Tutors set individual learning goals which do not focus sufficiently on the specific underpinning skills which learners need to develop, and personal goals are sometimes too broad to guide learners on what they need to improve. Tutors do not always use progress reviews well enough to help

learners manage and develop their learning, and do not always cause learners to reflect fully on how they can improve further.

- Staff conduct good initial assessment of learners' skills and learning needs, and identify their starting points accurately. However, ongoing assessment of learners' progress is not always effective; too many tutors do not consistently check progress during sessions. Tutors' verbal feedback to learners in sessions is constructive and helpful, but their written comments on learners' work are insufficiently detailed, with too little guidance on how to improve.
- Tutors are improving their methods for developing learners' English and mathematical skills, but in the majority of sessions these still require improvement. Tutors do not always exploit naturally occurring opportunities to develop learners' functional skills. They do not always correct errors in learners' spelling, punctuation and use of capital letters, thus missing opportunities to improve skills for employment.
- All staff provide very good advice, care and support for learners, and help them to develop their planned routes to achieve their learning and work goals. Learners have access to timely advice on both accredited and non-accredited courses, to help them to make decisions and to progress to further learning and work. Tutors and volunteers provide good individual learning support during sessions, and timely help for a wide range of personal issues. On accredited courses, learners have access to additional sessions to catch up with missed work, and complete work on time for external verification. Learners also benefit from good practice in examinations technique through mock examinations.
- Friendly and supportive staff provide a relaxed and safe place for learning, for learners who often have little experience of prior formal education. Tutors provide an inclusive learning environment where learners say they feel safe, can express their viewpoints freely, and find learning therapeutic and developmental. Tutors do not always systematically plan topics and contexts for their teaching to reflect fully the wider world and the rich diversity of local communities.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Leaders and managers have improved the quality and impact of their work since the previous inspection. Trustees have significantly, and positively, increased their interventions to help improve the quality of provision and outcomes for learners. They have, for example, introduced a productive quality improvement committee and identified individuals among their number to act as lead trustees for safeguarding and equality and diversity.
- Working in close partnership with trustees, a new Principal is managing the introduction of more rigorous management and quality improvement for Friends Centre. Work on these aspects is by no means complete; these aspects are not yet having sufficient impact on improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment or the success of learners in gaining their qualifications.
- Trustees promote well their clear vision for Friends Centre and its strong commitment to meet the education and training needs of its local communities, working in close and effective partnership with other providers and organisations in Brighton and environs. Trustees are now very effective in providing good challenge and support to the Principal, and have a good knowledge of the curriculum. Several trustees have a particularly good understanding of the world of adult and further education, which they use well in their work with Friends.
- Leaders and managers have secured a better common understanding by all staff of their high expectations of tutors and of their learners. Communications across Friends Centre have improved and lead tutors form an effective middle management team, increasingly holding tutors to account for learners' outcomes.
- Much work has been done to improve Friends Centre's self-assessment of its own strengths and areas for improvement. Leaders and managers have a good understanding of what Friends Centre needs to do to improve, including a key focus on improving teaching, learning and

assessment. They make extensive and constructive use of data about learners, but their judgements in the self- assessment report do not comprehensively cover all significant areas of strength and weakness. The key priorities action plan is much more useful in this respect.

- Managers have not yet ensured that lesson observations provide a totally secure basis for the consistent improvement of teaching, learning and assessment. A more skilled observation team is now taking a realistic view of the quality of lessons, and placing a greater emphasis on judging the impact of teaching upon learning. Observers do not always record their judgements about strengths and weaknesses, or suitable actions for improvement, sufficiently clearly.
- Managers are using the results of observations well to plan and deliver good staff development. The use of peer observations of teaching sessions is contributing well to tutors' understanding and development, and tutors are increasingly sharing good practice.
- Leaders and managers ensure that their work in partnership with other organisations is excellent. Friends Centre is at the heart of Brighton's work to meet the needs of adult learners. The close and successful partnership with other providers and agencies improves the life and work chances of its learners, who are often disadvantaged. It is an active member of the local adult education provider group and is in the advanced stages of discussions to further its role in the provision of courses within the city.
- Friends Centre ensures that it meets the needs of its local adult communities well, with a wide range of courses offered to meet established local demand. A significant proportion of the courses offered by Friends Centre, especially at pre-entry, entry levels 1 and 2 in ESOL and for English and mathematics, is only available within Brighton at Friends.
- Friends Centre is an inclusive community, where managers and staff fully promote the values of respect and equality, and ensure that legal duties are met. Learners from many different backgrounds feel welcomed and safe. Managers monitor the performance of different groups of learners and no significant differences exist in performance, except for the variations across courses.
- The safeguarding of all learners is good. All key measures and processes are in place, and are well managed and monitored. Friends Centre is taking appropriate steps to implement the 'Prevent' agenda to tackle radicalisation and extremism, and to develop further its measures in this regard.

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	Overall	14-16 part-time provision	14-16 full-time provision	16-19 study programmes	Traineeships	19+ learning programmes	Apprenticeships	Employability	Community learning
Overall effectiveness	3	-	-	-	-	3	-	-	3
Outcomes for learners	3	-	-	-	-	3	-	-	3
The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	3	-	-	-	-	3	-	-	3
The effectiveness of leadership and management	3	-	-	-	-	3	-	-	3

Subject areas graded for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Grade
Community learning	3

Provider details

Type of provider	Independent learning provider							
Age range of learners	19+							
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	738							
Principal/CEO	Ms Helen Osborne							
Date of previous inspection	January 2014							
Website address	www.friendscentre.org							
Provider information at the time of the inspection								
Main course or learning programme level	Level 1 or below		Level 2		Level 3		Level 4 and above	
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
	-	197	1	80	-	-	-	-
Number of apprentices by Apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+		
Number of traineeships	-	-	-	-	-	-		
	16-19		19+		Total			
Number of learners aged 14-16								
	Full-time		Part-time					
Number of community learners	-							
Number of employability learners	455							
Funding received from	-							
Funding received from	Skills Funding Agency (SFA)							
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Not applicable 							

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 is also supported by charitable donations from trusts and individuals. It also receives funding from the Skills Funding Agency for a Community Learning Mental Health Pilot and holds a National Careers Service contract for the delivery of information, advice and guidance. Its main centre is at Brighton Junction. It also provides learning in community venues across Brighton and Hove, including neighbourhood learning centres, children's centres, libraries, community centres, primary schools and a day centre. Friends Centre works in several areas of multiple deprivation in Brighton and Hove and 39% of its learners live in the most economically and socially disadvantaged areas of the city.

Information about this inspection

Lead inspector

David Martin HMI

One of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and two additional inspectors, assisted by the lead tutor for general adult education as nominee, 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 and employers; 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 all of 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:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/handbook-for-the-inspection-of-further-education-and-skills-from-september-2012

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