

Friends Centre

Independent learning provider

Inspection dates

23–25 January 2017

Overall effectiveness		Good	
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good	Adult learning programmes	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good		
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good		
Outcomes for learners	Good		
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection		Requires improvement	

Summary of key findings

This is a good provider

- Trustees, leaders and managers have taken very successful action to raise achievement rates; most learners now achieve their qualification or individual learning goals.
- Excellent partnerships ensure that courses align well to the city's needs and provide learners with good advice, guidance, support and progression routes.
- Safeguarding is well managed and learners feel safe.
- Staff create a welcoming and inclusive environment which helps learners overcome significant barriers to learning and work.
- Although managers use data and learners' views well to identify what needs to improve, their analysis of teaching, learning and assessment has not been sufficient to set precise enough improvement actions.
- Well-qualified and experienced tutors plan learning particularly well, making learning sessions relevant and interesting.
- Tutors use good teaching strategies to develop learners' confidence and knowledge.
- Learners gain good social and employability skills.
- Tutors promote British values very effectively, which helps learners participate more fully in their community.
- Learners take pride in their work, much of which is of a very high standard.
- Most learners make good progress but a minority in mixed-ability groups struggle to keep up or are not sufficiently challenged.
- Although most learners attend well, a few do not, or are late, which disrupts learning sessions.
- At the end of their course, most learners progress onto further learning, employment, an apprenticeship or volunteering.
- Achievement by the few learners taking English and mathematics qualifications requires improvement.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Friends Centre is an independent adult education organisation and charity based in Brighton. Its two main learning centres are in Brighton. Friends Centre also provides learning in a range of community venues, including children's centres and community hubs based on estates in the east of the city. Friends Centre works in several areas of multiple deprivation in Brighton and Hove and just under half the current learners are from these areas, which is higher than the previous inspection. Almost three quarters of learners take English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) courses. Friends Centre, along with its partners, offers specific courses for the increasing number of learners with mental health difficulties. Approximately two thirds of learners this year are on non-accredited courses where their success is based on achieving individual learning goals. The remaining learners are on courses that lead to qualifications. Friends Centre also has a National Careers Service contract for the delivery of information, advice and guidance.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Analyse the findings from observations of learning sessions more incisively to set specific actions in the quality improvement plan and enable trustees, leaders and managers to evaluate the effectiveness of strategies and progress in improving further the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.
- Ensure that all learners make good progress by promoting good attendance, setting additional challenging tasks for those that achieve more quickly and deploying volunteers more effectively to support learners who fall behind.
- Review whether the strategies introduced this year are successfully raising retention rates in English and achievement rates in mathematics, taking alternative action should this not be the case.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Leaders and managers set a clear strategic direction and priorities for the Friends Centre, with a strong focus on engaging with the most disadvantaged learners, including those furthest away from employment. Their excellent work with stakeholders and partners ensures that the curriculum is relevant to the needs of these adults and offers progression opportunities locally. Leaders and managers plan courses carefully to meet the challenges within Brighton's city plan; as a result, Friends Centre offers a wide range of ESOL courses at different levels and venues.
- Leaders and managers have taken very successful improvement action since the previous inspection. They use data effectively and set challenging targets. Managers' diligent monitoring of learners' attendance, retention and achievement has helped them identify where they need to take further action, such as introducing additional support and improving initial assessment. Learners' achievement has increased significantly and many areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection in teaching and assessment have been fully addressed.
- Managers observe the quality of learning sessions frequently and thoroughly. They identify pertinent weaknesses, give tutors support to help them improve and carry out follow-up observations to check that actions have been addressed. Managers use their observation findings well to identify topics for tutor development days, which are largely well attended.
- Managers are quick to identify underperformance and deal with this appropriately. Tutors receive feedback frequently about what they can improve. However, managers do not always set tutors targets in appraisal to improve course achievement rates and a few tutors have not been appraised recently.
- Although leaders and managers analyse learners' views and data critically to make self-assessment judgements, their identified strengths and weaknesses in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment are too vague. This impedes their ability to set specific enough actions within the quality improvement plan that will raise further the standard of learning sessions. Leaders and managers recognise this and have started to produce interim reports about the quality of learning sessions, but it is too early to judge the impact of these.
- Staff create a very inclusive learning environment. The large number of learners who have multiple and complex barriers to learning, including their levels of English, homelessness and unemployment, feel well supported and welcome. Excellent partnership working has resulted in specific courses being offered such as the ESOL course for Syrian refugees and well-being courses for adults with mental health difficulties.

The governance of the provider

- Trustees use their good expertise from education to challenge improvements in achievement rates, safeguarding and progress with quality improvement actions.
- Trustees give leaders and managers valuable support and are influential in setting Friends Centre's direction and priorities.

- Trustees do not receive a detailed enough analysis of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment to enable them to challenge whether improvement is sufficient.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Safeguarding is well managed. Trustees, managers and staff benefit from good training which they use to good effect to ensure that learners are safe.
- Managers work productively with partners to refer learners needing help and inform policies, procedures and training. They deal with incidents swiftly and appropriately.
- Leaders and managers implemented fully the requirements of the 'Prevent' duty.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Tutors plan learning sessions particularly well. They make good use of the detailed personal profiles of learners in their group, for example when selecting learners to work together in pairs or groups. During induction, learners progressing from a previous Friends Centre course conducted a health and safety tour of the building for new learners.
- Well-qualified and experienced tutors use their expertise to make learning relevant and interesting. They consider very carefully which topics will be most beneficial and useful for learners. Learners enjoy completing the wide variety of good-quality learning activities and resources that their tutors have developed. A tutor provided laminated maps and a wealth of local information to help learners gain ideas and start their project work.
- Tutors use good teaching strategies to develop learners' confidence and knowledge. They ask questions skilfully to ensure that all learners understand new concepts and theory. With careful prompting from tutors, ESOL learners develop their responses from single sentences to more confident expressions of their opinions, which they support with reasons and detail.
- Tutors teach English very effectively in discrete learning sessions and within ESOL and general adult education courses. They reinforce the correct use of grammar, spelling and industry terminology throughout learning sessions. In a fashion learning session, the tutor wrote key words on a flipchart and encouraged learners to use these when discussing their work.
- A few tutors teach mathematics in a fun and meaningful way. However, not all tutors encourage learners to develop their mathematical skills, for example to calculate time and distances as part of their project work.
- Tutors use information learning technology effectively. Learners extend their mathematics learning through accessing materials on a functional skills website that their tutor has developed. During assessment, tutors often photograph learners' work to demonstrate their proficiency and skills.
- Tutors assess learners' work, including homework, frequently and fairly. They give learners useful and detailed feedback which helps motivate them. Through assessment at the end of each learning session, learners are very clear about what they need to do to improve.
- Learners complete a comprehensive initial assessment at the start of their programme

which accurately identifies their English and mathematics levels. Tutors adapt these assessments appropriately for learners' circumstances, such as setting ESOL learners a simple writing exercise. They check learners' attainment and areas for development carefully by comparing on-course assessments with initial assessment results.

- In a minority of learning sessions, tutors do not give the most able learners sufficiently challenging activities to maintain their interest. Where they have volunteer support assistants in the group, not all tutors deploy them effectively enough to help learners work at different levels.
- Learners receive very good care and support which help them overcome problems and be more positive about their future prospects. Staff draw on their extensive partnership contacts to offer specialist help, such as with alcohol and drug abuse or homelessness. Learners benefit from individual in-class support from a team of enthusiastic volunteers, many of whom were previously Friends Centre learners.
- Most tutors promote equality and diversity well within learning sessions, where this is appropriate. They create a harmonious learning environment for learners, who typically come from a broad range of diverse cultural backgrounds. In a few learning sessions, tutors do not question learners' opinions enough, particularly about female stereotypes in employment.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

- Learners develop good social skills and confidence through interacting with their peers in learning sessions and in Friends Centre's social areas. Many learners overcome anxiety about learning, having not been in education for some time. Learners apply their learning and skills well in their home and personal life, for example in dealing with social services more confidently and helping their children with English and mathematics homework. Adults with mental health difficulties acquire useful coping strategies to alleviate stress and anxiety while also gaining an interest in subjects such as art, pottery and rag-rug making.
- Learners take pride in their work and achievements. The majority develop portfolios of work which demonstrate very clearly their development and progress. Fashion learners' portfolios show how their designs evolve as a result of their learning, through the initial concept, choice of fabrics and haberdashery, costings and evaluation, resulting in the finished garment.
- Learners develop good English and technical language knowledge and skills. They explain terminology well in relation to their chosen subject. ESOL learners become more proficient in speaking and writing clearly. Through completing a project about Brighton, they use capital letters, sentences and homophones within an everyday context.
- Learners receive relevant initial guidance about their course and what it involves through a comprehensive interview, assessment and induction process. They have clear information about progression routes and many have high aspirations for their future. Learners have good access to on-site independent careers advice and guidance.
- Learners feel safe. They know what to do and whom to contact should they need support, feel that they have been treated unfairly or if they, or their peers, are at risk from extremism or radicalisation.

- Tutors promote British values well by incorporating these within learning sessions. They help learners improve their speaking and listening skills by holding discussions on topics such as employment, the National Health Service and democracy. Learners who have recently arrived in the United Kingdom become more aware of their rights and responsibilities, enabling them to participate more fully in their local community.
- Learners' attendance has improved significantly since the previous inspection and is generally good. Their attendance and punctuality require improvement in a minority of subjects. At times, this affects the effectiveness of learning as tutors have to adapt planned group learning activities to run with less learners.

Outcomes for learners

Good

- Learners' achievement rates increased significantly over the last three years. As a result, the very large majority of learners achieve their qualifications or learning goals. Learners studying ESOL, fashion and art achieve particularly well, including at distinction level.
- Most learners on non-accredited courses achieve the very challenging learning goals they agree with their tutor at the start of their programme. Managers and tutors encourage learners to tackle new and difficult tasks, reviewing their progress thoroughly. Many learners work more effectively in teams, communicate clearly and carry out mathematical calculations independently after completing their course.
- The large number of learners with a disability and/or learning difficulty now achieve very well. Managers addressed the low achievement by this group of learners in previous years by introducing a new initial assessment that helps tutors focus support better. All other groups of learners achieve at a similar rate.
- Most learners make good progress. A few learners make slower progress, typically where they are in a mixed-ability group and either struggle to keep up or are insufficiently challenged to achieve their full potential.
- Learners produce good standards of work. They complete comprehensive portfolios of work, which detail well what they have achieved. Learners studying English create good-quality leaflets about Brighton's attractions and history while fashion learners make garments of a professional quality and finish.
- At the end of their course, most learners progress onto further learning, employment, volunteering or apprenticeships. A significant few become self-employed or establish community and social enterprises. Many learners volunteer as classroom assistants with the Friends Centre, providing valuable support for new learners. They become inspirational role models, demonstrating to learners how they can overcome substantial and multiple barriers to learning and employment.
- Achievement of qualifications by English and mathematics learners, which accounted for less than a tenth of last year's learners, requires improvement. Too many learners studying English qualifications left their course before completing it. In mathematics, learners' achievement of externally set tests is low and static. Managers know the underlying reasons and this year have strengthened initial assessment and introduced 'stepping stone' qualifications to better prepare learners to take functional skills qualifications.

Provider details

Unique reference number	51905
Type of provider	Independent learning provider
Age range of learners	19+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	1,184
Principal	Ms Helen Osborne
Telephone number	01273 810215
Website	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 or above	
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	–	478	–	41	–	–	–	–
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 to 16	–							
Number of learners for which the provider receives high-needs funding	–							
Funding received from:	Skills Funding Agency							
At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	Not applicable							

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the principal, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors used group and individual interviews and telephone calls to gather the views of learners and partners; these views are reflected within the report. They observed learning sessions and an induction session. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider.

Inspection team

Janet Rodgers, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

David Baber

Ofsted Inspector

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Raising concerns and making a complaint about Ofsted', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.gov.uk/government/publications/complaints-about-ofsted. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

Learner View

Learner View is a website where learners can tell Ofsted what they think about their college or provider. They can also see what other learners think about them too. To find out more go to www.learnerview.ofsted.gov.uk.

Employer View

Employer View is a website where employers can tell Ofsted what they think about their employees' college or provider. They can also see what other employers think about them too. To find out more go to www.employerview.ofsted.gov.uk.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk

This publication is available at www.gov.uk/ofsted.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2017