

our verdict

I LIKED Craft Arena. The craft area was cool, because we got to paint on big pieces of fabric. We didn't use paint brushes. We used special painting pens, which were easy to draw with. I drew on a couple of squares and they may be added to a really big sheet for children's charity. I like drawing and enjoyed the craft session."



Joseph Chambers, 9

I MADE pictures at Craft Arena. We had to paint on material which was cut into squares. I drew a picture of SpongeBob SquarePants. They were easy to do because we used painting pens instead of paint brushes. I drew another picture of a racing game on PlayStation that I like. I thought Craft Arena was a really fun day out."



Joshua Chambers, 6

fact file

- **Directions:** Craft Arena can be found at Barleylands Craft Village and Farm Centre, Barleylands Road, Billericay, which is close to the A127 Billericay exit. The 100 bus runs from Basildon and Billericay.
- **Opening times:** Tuesday to Sunday, from 10am to 5pm. Closed on Monday, but open on Bank Holiday Mondays.
- **Further information:** The children's workshop costs £5 plus the cost of the materials (around £7 to £8 in total including workshop fee).

Crafty corner

LIZ WADE and her two boys try out textile painting

ANYTHING arty always keeps the boys amused, so a workshop at Craft Arena sounded like the ideal afternoon adventure. We took part in a children's workshop at the studio, based at Barleylands Arts and Crafts Centre, Billericay, during the school holidays, with the promise of taking part in some textile painting.

I did wonder how messy the experience would be, as I noticed the children didn't have to pull on any aprons or overalls.

I discovered there wasn't any paint, just textile pens, so not only was it mess free, the children actually found it very easy to create their images on their textile squares.

We joined Craft Arena during October's Big Draw event, an annual national campaign that invites everyone to join in drawing sessions at a range of locations throughout the country from museums and libraries, to schools and art clubs.

Children visiting Craft Arena were invited to make a drawing on fabric, some of which will be sewn together to make a large textile hanging. This hanging will be presented to The Burned Children's Club in the new year, which they will then use to raise funds.

The boys embarked on creating some colourful squares



EYES DOWN: The boys enjoyed making pictures using different materials

including drawings of SpongeBob SquarePants and their favourite PlayStation games.

The boys thoroughly enjoyed the experience and they left their creations at Craft Arena for the chance to be included in the textile hanging.

Craft Arena, which opened at Barleylands in May, holds a children's workshop once a month offering some stitching fun, but also some fabric painting workshops.

The hour long children's sessions, which are held on the second Saturday of every month, are open to children of any age, as they are tailored for different age groups. The studio also holds extra workshops during the school holidays.

Parents can also get involved at the studio which holds regular adult

demonstrations and workshops including embroidering basics, Dorset buttons, stumpwork basics, hardanger, Angelina fibres, book covers, metal embossing, and making beads.

As well as its workshops, Craft Arena also provides needlework and craft supplies, haberdashery, beads, books and textile gifts for adults and children. It also displays a small exhibition of local textile artists. The current exhibition, which is running until November 30, is by Impetus, which is a group of Essex-based textile artists who use a variety of skills and techniques.

Denise Gannon, who set up Craft Arena, has always had a passion for stitching. And after working in administration for the NHS, before going on to website design, she decided to take her

passion one step further.

She is now running Craft Arena, with the help of her daughter Jennifer, who runs the children's session, and has recently completed a City & Guilds Certificate in Embroidery Craft and Design. She's now working towards her final diploma. Jennifer is also on the committee of the Basildon Stitching Club, which is the Basildon branch of the Essex Handicrafts Association.

As well as its workshops and exhibitions, the studio also sells embroidery and textile art supplies to artists and embroiderers.

Denise's aim is to see Craft Arena grow into a centre where local textile artists can showcase and sell their work, as well as provide the inspiration and supplies for people to create their own works of textile art.