

Liberty Woodland School

2025 ISA Award Winner

Excellence and Innovation in Early Years



Overview

Liberty Woodland School delivers a highly distinctive and forward-thinking Early Years education, rooted in the belief that children achieve exceptional outcomes when they are trusted, inspired, and fully immersed in meaningful experiences. Its fully outdoor model creates a dynamic environment where curiosity, wellbeing, and independence are not simply encouraged but embedded in every aspect of daily practice.

If you visit the school, you will immediately recognise a culture of calm purpose and deep engagement. Children move confidently and independently between learning opportunities, demonstrating a level of self-assurance and intrinsic motivation that sets the tone for the entire setting.



libertywoodlandschool.com

Case Study

June 2026

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At the heart of Liberty Woodland's success is its uncompromising commitment to child-led learning. Children are empowered to explore, initiate, and take ownership of their experiences, while skilled practitioners provide carefully judged guidance that enhances, rather than directs, learning.

If you spend time within the Early Years environment, you will see this in action. Learning flows seamlessly between adult-informed experiences and child-initiated exploration. Importantly, this freedom is underpinned by a constant and reassuring adult presence. Staff are always close by, ensuring health, safety, and emotional security while enabling children to take appropriate risks and develop independence with confidence.

In the outdoor environment, you may observe children collaboratively designing and constructing an obstacle course using planks and logs. These moments are rich in complexity and impact. Children problem-solve in real time, negotiate roles, support one another, and demonstrate fairness and respect through instinctive turn-taking. There is no need for adult intervention. Instead, children display high levels of cooperation, resilience, and determination, actively pushing their own physical and cognitive boundaries.

Exceptional Engagement and Independence

Engagement across the setting is consistently high. If you observe closely, every child is purposeful, focused, and fully invested in their learning. Small groups work alongside adults on creative and expressive projects, while others read independently or pursue self-directed exploration.



Leanna, Head of School

office@libertywoodlandschool.com

There is a striking absence of low-level disruption or disengagement. Children demonstrate sustained concentration, independence, and a genuine enthusiasm for learning that is both intrinsic and enduring.

Within the tipi tent, children may engage in structured yet playful literacy experiences, such as matching words to meanings through interactive games. These moments exemplify how core skills are embedded with precision and purpose, without losing a sense of enjoyment or relevance.

Throughout all of this, adults maintain a highly attuned presence, ensuring that every child is supported, safe, and meaningfully extended in their learning.

Transformational Storytelling and Language Development

Group storytelling sessions illustrate the depth and quality of teaching practice. If you join a session, it becomes immediately clear that this is not simply reading a book, but a rich, immersive learning experience.

Children are actively involved from the outset, often choosing the story themselves, immediately strengthening engagement and ownership. As the story unfolds, they analyse illustrations, predict outcomes, and articulate thoughts and emotions with confidence and enthusiasm.

The teacher facilitates this process with precision and expertise, drawing out language, encouraging discussion, and deepening understanding. The result is a highly effective, dialogue-rich environment where communication, comprehension, and emotional literacy are developed at an advanced level.

Physical Development Driving Academic Excellence

The continuous outdoor environment plays a critical role in accelerating physical development. Children climb, balance, lift, build, and manipulate materials throughout the day, developing both gross and fine motor skills in authentic and highly meaningful contexts.

If you observe closely, the impact of this is significant. Children demonstrate exceptional coordination, control, and spatial awareness, alongside a clear understanding of their own capabilities.

This strong physical foundation directly supports academic development. Many children independently engage in writing, producing work that is notably advanced for their age. Their handwriting reflects well-developed fine motor control, achieved not through repetitive tasks but through sustained, purposeful physical activity embedded in their daily experience.

Wellbeing, Behaviour, and Culture of Excellence

Wellbeing underpins every aspect of the Early Years provision. The culture is one of respect, belonging, and emotional security, creating the conditions for children to thrive.

If you spend time within the setting, you will see children who are calm, self-regulated, and highly respectful of one another. Positive interactions are the norm. Collaboration is natural. Confidence is evident.

This is sustained through the consistent presence of skilled adults who model strong relationships, support emotional development, and ensure a safe, nurturing environment. Their role is both protective and empowering, enabling children to flourish while maintaining the highest standards of care and safety.

Conclusion

Liberty Woodland School's Early Years provision represents a compelling and highly effective model of innovative education. It demonstrates, with clarity and impact, what can be achieved when children are given freedom within a framework of expert support, high expectations, and deep respect.

If you visit, you will encounter children who are confident, articulate, physically capable, and deeply engaged in their learning. They collaborate with ease, think independently, and embrace challenge with enthusiasm and resilience.

By embedding wellbeing, curiosity, and real-world experience at its core, Liberty Woodland does more than prepare children for the next stage of education. It equips them with the skills, mindset, and confidence to succeed far beyond it.

