

Children's Services

Winter Newsletter



Weather disruption to schools

There will inevitably be days during the winter where the weather causes disruption to both schools and school transport. This newsletter contains the information most frequently requested by parents and carers.

Shetland Islands Council and the Scottish Government share the same clear objective of keeping schools open, wherever practicable, to minimise both the impact on education provision, and the wider community.

During times of severe weather Children's Services:

- Work to keep our schools open wherever possible;
- Provide a good educational experience during times of disruption;
- Enable as many pupils as possible to access work from home;
- Provide pupils with specific work for home study; and
- Provide opportunities for pupils to 'catch up' with work where necessary.

Where to find up-to-date information

Mornings

- The school's social media / website account should be your first stop for information regarding school closures and changes to school transport. Note this is an information only post and may not be monitored or replied to.
- Schools will send communicate to all parents to notify them of the school's closure.
- Shetland Island Council's Facebook page is updated as soon as information is available. Shetland Islands Council's news pages will also carry news of any school closures at: www.shetland.gov.uk/news
- Where possible school closure information is passed to BBC Radio Shetland and Radio Orkney, for broadcast on their programme at 07:30 on 92.7FM. Information will also be passed onto SIBC on 96.2FM for broadcast in the news bulletin.

Note: In bad weather conditions, it is often challenging to obtain specific route information, as this will depend on the local weather and road conditions. We therefore are only able to advise whether there may be disruptions to school transport in general. We are unable to respond to specific enquires, as the information we receive is network wide. Information regarding specific route cancellations will be available on the Shetland Island Council **School Transport Voice Bank 01595 745743**. There is also the Shetland Island Council **Public Bus Services Information Voice Bank 01595 745744**.

Please note that this Voicebank may be updated several times as information is received.

Throughout the school day

- Schools have arrangements in place to contact parents if the school is closing early, or if scheduled transport times are brought forward.
- SIC Facebook media will continue to provide information on any disruption during the day.

School Transport and Parental Responsibilities

During periods of adverse weather, it is possible that some or all school transport may be cancelled or required to operate a curtailed service (for example main roads only) depending on local road conditions. As the driver of the school transport has responsibility for the safety of their passengers and vehicle, they may make changes during the school day, including cancellation. We will endeavour to communicate any changes as quickly as possible.

If your regular pick up/drop off point is on a side road and conditions in your area are poor, you may wish to use the alternative point, where your side road meets the main road, for pick up and be there in the afternoon for drop off.

Decisions to cancel or amend school transport routes are taken in the interests of the safety and welfare of pupils, bus drivers and other road users. These decisions are taken by operators in liaison with Transport Planning staff and will consider the prevailing weather forecast and road conditions. This information will be shared with Children's Services and Head Teachers.

Throughout the winter months the Met Office often issues 'Yellow' (be aware) warnings for both wind and snow/ice. On rare occasions these are upgraded to 'Amber' (be prepared) warnings. Where an 'Amber' warning is issued with advance notice from the Met Office, this will likely result in a blanket closure of all schools. Notification of this will be via sources listed above.

In deciding whether a school will be closed, as a rule, we will still review on the morning of the predicted severe weather, as it may be that the weather has since changed for the better and, whilst there will be no transport, the schools could remain open.

As the inevitable short daylight hours of Winter approach, as always, we urge parents and carers to remind children of the importance of crossing the road safely, and of being seen in the dark. Please remind children that they must **never** take a signal from **any** driver to cross – as the driver may not be able to see if the road is clear in both directions.



Parents are responsible for their children until they have boarded school transport each morning, and from the moment they alight from the afternoon journey. To minimise the risk of accidents, it is advised that parents stand on the same side of the road as the pick-up and drop-off point. Pedestrians should only cross when the bus has driven off and you can see clearly in both directions.

Over the winter months when conditions of severe weather can arise, we advise that parents agree a length of time, such as 20 minutes, that children will wait for transport at their designated pick-up point before returning or contacting home if it has not arrived. Parents should then contact the operator directly in the first instance so they may advise if there has been a delay, and if a vehicle is on its way. Their telephone number is on your route allocation letter (we recommend you save or keep their phone number handy). You can also contact the Voice Bank for up to date information regarding school transport and service bus information (telephone number page 1).

Make sure your children are aware of what to do if the bus is late or does not arrive. It is good practice for children to have an emergency contact number with them. It must be stressed that the responsibility for the safety and welfare of children prior to boarding school transport remains with the parent.

If there is no school transport due to bad weather, parents must decide whether it is safe to transport their children to school. We expect parents to base this decision on the conditions in their area. We do not expect that all parents will be able to transport their children. Should a parent decide that it is not safe to put their child to school, then they must contact the school stating that the absence is weather-related, and the absence will be marked as authorised.

If school transport is cancelled in the morning by the operator, and parents make the decision to transport their children to school, they must also arrange their afternoon transport as the operator may not be operating. If the weather has greatly improved throughout the day, transport will be scheduled to take pupils home, this will be communicated by School staff through the usual channels.

Parents also need to be available to pick up their children earlier if conditions deteriorate and an earlier closure is needed. It is therefore essential that parents provide the school with up-to-date emergency contact details. In the event of an early closure schools will contact parents. It is important that parents are familiar with the emergency closure procedures and can be reached on the numbers given.

Be Safe, Be Seen, Be Warm this Winter

It is important that pupils are seen – whether walking or cycling to school or waiting for the school bus. Pupils should understand the difference it makes in terms of motorists being able to see them in plenty of time, and wear (or carry) something bright or Hi-Viz (reflective strips on coats, bags, shoes, LED flashing lights etc).

Pupils should also dress warmly to suit the weather conditions in case there is an unexpected delay to school transport.

After completing cycle training, pupils cycling to school should take the same safety measures as those walking and wear reflective clothing. In addition, it is strongly advised that they wear a cycle helmet and have operational lights – red at the back and white at the front. Red rear reflectors and spoke reflectors will also help ensure that cyclists are seen in the dark.

Coughs, colds, sneezes and Winter Vomiting Bug

As the winter weather closes in, we naturally gravitate towards indoor activities; congregating indoors is just one of the factors that leads to an increased spread of winter illnesses or “respiratory illness” like colds, Flu and Covid. If you or your child experience symptoms of cough, cold or fever you should follow self-care advice on NHS Inform here: [Winter illness | NHS inform](#). As well as common respiratory illness, we also tend to see an increase in diarrhoea and vomiting, otherwise known as “gastrointestinal illness”; information on this can be found here: [Gastroenteritis | NHS inform](#). More specifically, Norovirus, or the “winter vomiting bug” is a type of gastrointestinal illness that can circulate easily this time of year; information can be found here: [Norovirus | NHS inform](#). NHS Shetland have a handy “guide for parents” leaflet on diarrhoea and vomiting available on the Health Shetland website found there: [DV-information-leaflet-2023-005.pdf](#)

If you or your child is unwell it is important to consider whether you should avoid contact with other people, a handy guide for parents on when to keep a child off school is available here: [Should I keep my child off school checklist poster](#). If your child is not attending school due to illness please can parents contact the school and notify them that their child(ren) will not be attending school.

Any questions or comments

Further details of various aspects of school transport provision, including the school transport policy, frequently asked questions, and advice to and the responsibilities of parents/carers, is available at <https://www.Shetland.gov.uk>. Executive Manager Schools: Brenda Leask; Brenda.leask@shetland.gov.uk