



Shetland Islands Council

Whalsay School – A *Connected Community of Learners*

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Dear Parent/Carer,

It is my pleasure to welcome you and your child(ren) back to Whalsay School for the new Academic Year, 2025-2026. We begin the year with a great deal of positivity, energy and excitement; ready to support, nurture and care for all our pupils in all phases and departments of the school. It has been a pleasure to reconnect with so many pupils and parents across the opening days of the term. Visiting classrooms and seeing our pupils engaged and excited about their work, seeing the interactions with teachers and support staff is a pleasure to observe.

Our School's Mission

You will see at the top of this letter, our new school mission: For our school community to be a '**Connected Community of Learners**'. This has been created following consultation with all stakeholders in the school and extensive observation of school operations last Academic Year. The mission recognises that Whalsay is a tight knit, supportive community and our school should always play a central role in the life of the community. Equally, it recognises the importance of learning in all forms; daily pupil learning as well as our continued learning journeys as parents and educators.

Priorities for School Development 2025-26

Following our consultation processes at the end of last academic year, our school development priorities have been set out and are as follows:

- 1) **Differentiated support and challenge** – Providing support and challenge for all pupils to support them with their learning.
- 2) **Parental Engagement** – Developing strategies and means to ensure parents are informed about what their young person is learning about and can provide support at home.
- 3) **Rights Respecting School** – In the 2025-26 Academic Year, we will be starting our journey towards becoming a Rights Respecting School. Information about this national initiative can be found here ([RRSA in Scotland - Rights Respecting Schools Award](#))

National Qualifications Results:

I would like to pass on my sincere congratulations to all of our recently departed students at Whalsay School who undertook national examinations and received their results during the summer break. Our

pupils N5 results were pleasing and above national averages. I would like to thank teaching and support staff for all their hard work in preparing pupils for their exams and other components that make up the qualifications. I wish these young people well as they take their next steps in their journey.

Communication with the School:

As usual, you will be able to find up-to-date information on the school blog and as the year progresses, we will keep you informed of any new dates for your calendars. I would encourage you to look at it if you haven't done so already (address above). Our School Handbook is available to read on the blog and our School Improvement Plan/Standards and Quality Report will be shared with Parents in due course.

News of upcoming events are also shared on **Whalsay School Facebook page**. This page is open to all parents and staff of the school – if you would like to be included, please put in a request to be added to the group.

If we could also please ask that you add the school's email address whalsay@shetland.gov.uk to your address books to prevent emails going undelivered or into your spam folders.

Should you need to contact school about your child's progress, please contact us by phone or in writing, rather than through social media. In Nursery and Primary, in the first instance, queries should be directed to your child's teacher. If the issue is particularly significant or serious, please get in touch with either of our Depute Head Teachers: Mrs Lynsey Irvine or Miss Pauline Irvine. In Secondary please contact Pupil Support: Miss Eyvor Irvine.

Complaints Procedure:

If you have a complaint to make in relation to your child's progress or the School in general, please contact me directly, at the School.

The matter will be treated confidentially, and the School Leadership Team will talk through how best to resolve the situation and let you know how the matter has progressed.

After speaking to us, if you feel that the matter cannot be resolved at school level, you may contact our QIO at SIC Children's Services. An information leaflet is available from the School and in the Parents' section of the website under Policies.

Annual Data Check

These forms will be sent out shortly. Please check, sign, and update details where necessary and return them to school with your child as soon as possible. The Term Dates card will be sent home along with the forms. Please keep the card so as you can refer to the holiday dates throughout the school year.

Primary Break Times

Weather permitting, all pupils will be expected to play outside at morning and lunchtime intervals. Please ensure your child has appropriate warm clothes i.e. jacket, scarf, gloves with them each day. If you do not wish your child to go outside any day i.e. due to illness, please ensure you write a note in your child's homework diary or phone the school office.

Fetching Primary Pupils at end of School Day

From Primary 2 onwards, pupils may leave school at the end of the day without adult supervision. When Primary 1 pupils are in full days, they should be picked up from the outside door of the classroom.

Traffic Management and Cycling to School

I have attached a map of the Primary School and car park. For the safety of everyone around the school, please use the parking areas designated on the map when dropping off and picking up your children.

Please avoid parking on the roundabout or blocking the car parks at all times as this can impact the flow of traffic and our drop off system.

In order to ensure the safety of pupils around Secondary at picking up time, we have agreed with parents an unofficial one-way system at picking up times (Mon-Thurs 3.40 and Friday 2.00). This involves asking parents/carers picking up pupils to take a clockwise route past the school. This will mean that traffic is all moving in the same direction as the school bus. The route is marked on the map below and we would like to continue with this system this session. We would respectfully ask parents/carers to continue to cooperate with this and to get in touch with me if there are any concerns or issues that come up as a result of it.

As a school we want to promote cycling to school, and pupils regularly benefit from Bikeability sessions in upper Primary. However, you should be aware that it is for you as parent/carer to decide when you feel your child is able to cycle to school unsupervised. In making this decision you may want to keep in mind that Bikeability Level 2 courses are not offered to children under 10 as their perception of traffic speed is generally not well enough developed. We would recommend that pupils cycling to school wear a helmet and that their bicycles are regularly checked.

Music Tuition

If your child has weekly music instruction, please note that it is their responsibility to check the timetable and turn up on time for their lesson with their music folder. They may not receive their lesson if they forget their music folder which limits continuity and hinders their progression. Regular practice at home is also important.

If your child is interested in taking up any of these instruments, please apply online to add them to the waiting list - [Instrumental Instruction – Shetland Islands Council](#)

Attendance

The Education (Scotland) Act requires parents to ensure that their children attend school regularly and clearly it is in the children's interest to do so. If your child is absent, please phone the school before 9.30am on the day your child is off to inform the school of the reason for absence. If you do not phone, a member of the School Office will be in touch to enquire about the absence. Please note, legally, we are obliged to ask why your child is absent from school.

If your child becomes unwell during the school day, you will be contacted, and appropriate arrangements will be agreed.

Should your child be arriving in late, or need to leave school early, please put a note in to the school office as well as informing register teachers so that we can keep accurate records of pupil absence and attendance.

We know that regular attendance supports learning and, for Secondary pupils, directly affects a pupil's chances of achieving National Qualifications. For this reason, attendance in S4 is crucial as absences inevitably reduce the time that teachers have to support pupils with course work and revision.

Please let us know if your child is worried about something or if you notice sudden changes in behaviour. These could be tied to something going on in school.

Check on your child's attendance to be sure absences are not piling up and ask for help from the school if you are having difficulty in getting your child to school.

In cases of unsatisfactory attendance, the Head Teacher, Depute Head Teacher and/or Pupil Support Teacher will discuss the problem with parents and strategies will be developed, seeking to improve the situation. The leaflet below from SIC's Childrens' Services has more information and advice on this issue:

[037-Attach-Attendance-Leaflet.pdf \(glowscotland.org.uk\)](https://www.glowscotland.org.uk/037-Attach-Attendance-Leaflet.pdf)

Family Holidays & Requests for Leave of Absence

Circular No 5/03 from the Scottish Executive Education Department, dated 26th June 2003, states that family holidays are to be classified as "unauthorised absence" from school unless under exceptional circumstances.

Every effort should be made to avoid taking holidays during term time as this disrupts the child's formal education and reduces learning time.

Please refer to the Application for Leave of Absence of Pupil (s) forms. These are available to download from the School website and paper copies can be collected from either School Offices. These forms should be completed at least one week prior to the proposed absence. Staff will only be expected to organise work for pupils during their absence if the absence has been authorised by the school.

[Application-for-Leave-of-Absence-of-Pupil.pdf \(glowscotland.org.uk\)](https://www.glowscotland.org.uk/Application-for-Leave-of-Absence-of-Pupil.pdf)

Dress / Property

There is no special uniform, but we expect pupils to be smart and tidy. We would ask parents to cooperate with us in not sending children to school in clothes which could be described as offensive to others, e.g. slogans on T-shirts.

We cannot accept responsibility for lost property and valuables and large sums of money should not be carried to school.

Period Equality

Shetland Islands Council are providing access to Free Period Products. These products are available for anyone who menstruates and is attending a school in Shetland.

You can complete the order form at the following link, to request a one-off 3 month supply of products or to sign up to a 3 monthly subscription that will be sent directly to your door. (Delivery may take up to 28 days.)

https://my.shetland.gov.uk/en/AchieveForms/?mode=fill&consentMessage=y&form_uri=sandbox-publish%3A//AF-Process-64c04772-ec94-476a-bdbc-158d69eaf5a5/AF-Stage-7500f301-c57b-4840-b36f-7f579e88d96c/definition.json&redirectlink=/en&cancelRedirectLink=/en&consentMessage=yes

A selection of products is also available in school, for pupils to use when necessary.

Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme

All under 22s resident in Scotland will have access to free bus travel from 31 January 2022. Those eligible will receive access to the **Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme** using their National Entitlement Card, allowing them to travel for free on buses across Scotland.

However, children under the age of 16 **MUST** have approval from their parent or guardian before free travel is added to their card

Secondary pupils who attend a Skills for Work Course will be expected to use their free travel pass in the future, so we would urge you to apply, if you have not already done so.

Application forms can be found at the following links:

Form for **NEW Junior** NEC applications (**5-10years**) – [Junior National Entitlement Card Application – Introduction – Self \(shetland.gov.uk\)](#)

Form for 11-15 year olds. This form is for **NEW** applications, including photo updates. Do not use this form to get a replacement Young Scot card. [Young Scot National Entitlement Card Application – Introduction – Self \(shetland.gov.uk\)](#)

This form is for **EXISTING Young Scot NEC holders aged 11-21 years only.** [Young Scot National Entitlement \(EXISTING\) Card – Approval, Opt-In Under 22 Free Bus Travel – Introduction – Self \(shetland.gov.uk\)](#)

If you are unable to complete the form online, please get in touch and we can help you with the application.

Administration of Medicines:

Generally, the school cannot administer any drugs or medicines to pupils. However, there are two sets of circumstances in which requests can be made to the Head Teacher or Depute Head Teacher to deal with the administering of medicines to pupils at school:

- (A) Cases of chronic illness or long-term complaints such as asthma, diabetes or epilepsy and
- (B) Cases when children recovering from short-term illness are well enough to return to school but are receiving a course of antibiotics, etc

The School Management Team will only accept responsibility if the medicine is brought to the school by the Parent, not the child, and must be delivered personally to the Head Teacher or Depute Head Teacher along with written guidelines for administration, signed by the parent/carer and doctor.

Secondary Pupils' Homework Diaries

We have again purchased a homework diary for each of our Secondary pupils. We are keen for pupils, parents and staff to use this resource. Please do check and sign the homework diary each week.

Primary Homework

To develop the pupils' digital literacy skills and support the work done during home learning and in school, upper Primary pupils will continue to use Teams on Glow for some of their homework activities. Digital literacy is a key part of the curriculum, and it is becoming increasingly important in the wider world, so the Primary staff are keen to give independent tasks to complete at home, building on the work done in school.

Parent Council

Whalsay School Parent Council exists to encourage the community to be involved in the life of the school, the education of the pupils and to provide a means for the expression of parents' interests and views.

The names of all of the School's Parent Council members are on the School Blog.

<https://blogs.glowscotland.org.uk/sh/whalsayschoolweb/for-parents/parent-council/>

Staffing Updates

I am delighted to share a number of staffing updates in different areas of the school:

- Ms. Emily Robertson moves from our Learning Support department to become our Senior Practitioner in the Nursery.
- Mrs. Alison Shearer joins the team as our Play Support Worker.
- Ms. Dionne Pottinger joins our Nursery team as a Support worker in the ELC having previously worked at Scalloway Primary School.
- Ms. Chloe Cheyne has joined our school as a Probationer teacher of Physical Education following the completion of her studies at the University of Edinburgh.
- Mrs. Kari Hamilton takes on the role of Business Management teacher in the Secondary School. The Business Management course initially launches with an S3 class. This role is in addition to Mrs. Hamilton working as our ASN teacher in Secondary.

Dinner Money

The cost of Primary dinners this term has changed to £2.50 per day and Secondary dinners £3.00 per day. All meals must now be pre-booked on the Parent Pay system. School milk has increased to £1.25 per week for pupils who choose to take milk, amounts due for the term will show up on your ParentPay account shortly.

Adult Learning

Information about Adult Learning's 2024/25 classes will be available soon. You can view and book all classes on the Learn Shetland website at www.learnshetland.com

Scottish Childhood and School Flu Immunisation Programme 2025/26

Later in year, we will be participating in this programme. More information about the programme can be found on the following link: <https://www.nhsinform.scot/childflu>

If you have any questions, or would like to discuss anything further, please do not hesitate to contact me at the School.

Yours sincerely

Niall Healy
Head Teacher