



*Equity, Excellence, Evolution*

*The Five Islands Academy is an all-age, multi-site, Church of England Academy, serving the island communities of Bryher, St Agnes, St Martin's, St Mary's and Tresco. It is part of the Leading Edge Academies Partnership.*

Wednesday 17th December 2025

### **Attendance: the Why and the How**

Dear Parents and Carers

This letter might be a bit of an essay, but please bear with me as I share with you the details of our Trust Attendance Strategy to improve children's attendance at Five Islands Academy, and therefore their academic progress, friendships and sense of belonging, and even their long-term life chances.

Firstly, I want to start by saying that our communications around attendance come from a genuine place of care, understanding, compassion and commitment to your children's and your families' wellbeing. We know how hard it can be if your child is often unwell or is struggling with mental health or worries about school. We know how tricky it can be getting to medical or dentist's appointments on the mainland, or travelling to an important family event such as a wedding or a funeral. When we contact you with an 'attendance letter', it is never a personal judgement, but an offer of support first while sharing a consistent message about the importance of attendance at school.

Attached to this letter, you will find our updated Attendance Policy, which brings us into line with the schools at Truro & Penwith Academies Trust (TPAT) - the Trust we will be joining in the Spring. We are being supported by the TPAT attendance team and the Council of the Isles of Scilly to ensure our processes are fully in place and that we are working together to improve school attendance in line with new [Government guidance here](#). You may therefore notice some changes in our communications, and I want to take time in this letter to explain these, so they do not come as a surprise or make you feel worried.

#### **Why is school attendance such a big deal?**

School attendance has become a national priority for the Department for Education, particularly following a big rise in persistent absence since the Covid disruption.

The big messages around attendance are:

- Academic attainment: children who attend more than 95% of the time are 30% more likely to meet the expected standard in their Year 6 SATs than those between 90% and 95% - and less than half of children who are below 90% attendance ('persistently absent') achieve this standard! So far this year, 25 of our children are already falling below 90% attendance, and that's worrying.

*All aboard! Navigating together*

[www.fiveislands.scilly.sch.uk](http://www.fiveislands.scilly.sch.uk)

- Academic attainment: it's even worse at Secondary. 84% of key stage 4 students who always attend school achieve a grade 9–4 in English and maths GCSE, compared with only 36% of students who were below 90% attendance ('persistently absent'). Currently, 20 of our Secondary students count as persistently absent.
- Reducing inequality: children with SEND or who receive free school meals often have higher absence rates, which worsens existing inequalities.
- Long-term outcomes: poor attendance impacts future earnings. Persistently absent pupils in secondary school are on average likely to earn £10,000 less at age 28 compared to pupils with near-perfect attendance!
- Wellbeing & belonging: being in school supports social skills, friendships and overall mental health, preparing children for adulthood.

### **How can we help your child if they are struggling to come to school?**

We have a wide range of pastoral support services that we offer for children who are finding coming to school difficult. In the first place, we will contact you with a Tier 1 letter to say that we have noticed your child having missed time from school, or had a number of 'broken weeks', and will offer a meeting with your child's teacher or tutor to talk about whether there is anything we can put in place to help. This might include check ins with a trusted adult, support with friendship issues, or opportunities to access one of our quiet spaces in school, such as the Cabin or the Harbour if things feel a bit overwhelming.

If your child's absence falls below 90% (this means that they are missing about 19 days in the school year, or 95 lessons), we will invite you for a Tier 2 meeting to create a Pupil Support Plan together. We will listen to your child's wishes to find out what they think would help, and will agree specific actions for both school and parents to take. These could include additional mental health and wellbeing support from our in school practitioner, Karen Kershaw, or a referral to our School Nurse or NHS Mental Health Support Team; soft starts to make the beginning of the day easier, or a phased return to lessons if your child has been absent for a long time. We might discuss whether you could access some family assistance from our partners at Children's Services through Early Help or Child in Need support. You can find out more about our Tiered Approach in Appendix 3 of the policy.

### **What changes might you notice to our communications?**

In order to fulfil our shared duty to support high attendance and address absence swiftly, we need to work with parents to make sure we have clear records of when and why children may be absent from school. Our School Receptionists, Jenny Lewin and Florence Freeland (who is also our Attendance Officer) may ask you some questions about children's absences, and we hope you will understand that this isn't being nosy but keeping accurate records! For example:

- If you phone in or email to say your child is ill, it would be great if you could tell us what is wrong, rather than just saying they are poorly, or not in school today.
- If you let us know that your child is going for medical appointments, we might ask to see an appointment confirmation or other medical information, particularly if these involve missing a lot of school outside holiday time.
- If you send in an Exceptional Circumstances Leave of Absence Form, we would appreciate you giving us as much information as possible to help us understand whether the absence can be authorised, including dates and times of appointments or travel arrangements. Jenny and Florence may contact you for further information if needed.
- If your child arrives so late that the registers have closed (9.00am), this counts for a half-day's absence according to DfE guidelines. If this happens regularly, you may receive a Tier 1 letter from

Florence or a Tier 2 invitation to a Pupil Support Plan meeting, so we can work out what is preventing your child from arriving on time, and how we can help.

### **Term time holidays**

It is crucial that we make it very clear that by law, Headteachers are not allowed to authorise absence during term time unless the circumstances are exceptional. Term time holidays have the biggest impact on persistent absence at Five Islands Academy; so far, 474 sessions have been missed this year for family holidays alone. Many of our children who have been absent for term time holidays have not kept up with their lessons and are therefore experiencing significant gaps in their learning. We urge you to book your holiday travel outside term times, please. At the end of this letter, you will see a warning about taking term time holidays; we are expected to send this out each year to ensure that parents are aware of the law about these.

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I hope that this letter has been helpful in explaining why we are working so hard to improve children's attendance at Five Islands Academy, and how we are trying to do this. All parents can check their child's current attendance details on the Arbor app - if there is anything that looks wrong on there, don't hesitate to contact our attendance team via [enquiries@fiveislands.org](mailto:enquiries@fiveislands.org) - there are occasional technical errors that need correcting.

This letter is a joint communication from Five Islands Academy and the Council of the Isles of Scilly. We are working closely together, alongside Truro & Penwith Academies Trust, to support families where attendance is a concern and to ensure that children and young people across the islands receive the help they need to attend school regularly and feel supported to succeed. Our shared approach is rooted in early support, understanding individual circumstances, and working in partnership with families wherever possible.

Our shared key message is that we want our islands school to be a place where children feel safe, seen and supported, and where parents feel comfortable to talk to us when there are barriers to their child's attendance. Please do contact your child's teacher or tutor, or our attendance team if there is any support you need to help your child attend and thrive at school.

Yours faithfully

Rachel Lewin  
Interim Headteacher and Attendance Lead

Laura Thompson  
Head of Education, Inclusion and Virtual School



## Statutory Term Time Holidays Warning

DfE statutory guidance is clear: holidays during term time will not be authorised unless there are exceptional circumstances.

Unavoidable leave of absence requests for school-aged children are generally related to one off events that are rare, significant, unavoidable, and short in duration. Family holidays are not considered unavoidable.

Taking your child out of school without permission may result in a Penalty Notice being issued.

What this means:

- A Penalty Notice may be issued if your child has unauthorised absences, including holidays.
- The fine is £80 per child, per parent if paid within 21 days, rising to £160 if paid within 28 days.
- Failure to pay may result in prosecution.
- There is no right of appeal - if you believe a notice was issued in error, you must contact the school directly.

We understand that holidays are important for family time, but we are legally required to prioritise your child's education and wellbeing. Every school day counts.

*If your child is absent from school without authorisation, you will be committing an offence under the Education Act 1996. We may submit a request to Isles of Scilly Council for a Penalty Notice to be issued, in accordance with Sections 444A and 444B of the said Act. Penalty Notices are issued per liable parent, per child and each carry a fine of £80 if paid within 21 days or £160 if paid after this but within 28 days*

*If your child is further absent from school without authorisation within any 3-year period, you will be committing a further offence under the Education Act 1996. We may submit a request to Isles of Scilly Council for a Penalty Notice to be issued, in accordance with Sections 444A and 444B of the said Act. Penalty Notices for a second offence are issued per liable parent, per child and each carry a fine of £160, payable within 28 days.*

*Importantly, fines per parent will be capped to two fines within any three-year period. Once this limit has been reached, other action such as a parenting order or prosecution will be considered.*

*Failure to pay the Penalty Notice may also result in legal action. If you are prosecuted and attend court because your child has not been attending school, you could get a fine of up to £2,500. Isles of Scilly Council may also apply for the costs incurred in taking the matter to Court, including legal costs.*

*Absence not authorised by the school may also result in a prosecution in the Magistrates' Court under Section 444(1) or Section 444(1A) of the Education Act 1996, leading to a fine of up to £2,500 and/or a custodial sentence. Again, Isles of Scilly Council may also apply for the costs incurred in taking the matter to Court, including legal costs.*

*Money raised from fines is only used by the local authority to cover the costs of administering the system, and to fund attendance support. Any extra money is returned to the government.*

If you have any questions or need to discuss exceptional circumstances, please contact the school office.