

Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills submission of 21 December 2022

PE1896/D: Provide every primary school child in Scotland with a reusable water bottle

I am writing to provide you with an update to Petition PE 1896, lodged by Callum Isted, about providing reusable water bottles in primary schools.

The First Minister met Callum earlier this year to hear about his petition and how he had walked the John Muir Way in order to raise money to buy reusable water bottles for his school. I commend him for such an admirable achievement and feel that this petition has further enhanced his achievement by helping to raise public awareness about how important it is to take steps to care for the environment more generally.

As you will be aware, there is a statutory requirement that all schools must make sure that drinking water is available free of charge for all pupils at all times of the day, including at meal times. It is up to each school and local authority to decide how drinking water is provided. We believe that schools are best placed to decide what works best for their pupils.

It is also important to note that the Learning for Sustainability cross-curricular theme encourages schools to take a whole setting approach to sustainability. This means that all school buildings, grounds and policies within the school should support Learning for Sustainability, including making sure the school is taking steps to be more sustainable, which includes reducing the use of plastic.

I understand that local authorities have already taken a number of positive steps to improve sustainability in relation to the provision of food and drink in schools, including ensuring that water jugs and reusable cups are available in dining halls; using packaging which is made from fully compostable materials such as corn starch; and encouraging pupils to bring their own reusable water bottles to school. I have separately written to Directors of Education in local authorities to thank them for their continued work on this matter, and to make them aware of Callum's petition for their consideration when they make decisions about how they wish to provide drinking water to pupils within their schools in a sustainable manner.

In addition, the First Minister has also written directly to Callum to offer the opportunity to meet with him again if he wishes to discuss his petition further with her.

I enclose a copy of both my letter to the Directors of Education at local authorities, and of the First Minister's letter to Callum Isted for your reference.

Dear Directors of Education,

I am writing to you to make you aware of a petition which has been lodged with the Scottish Parliament by a young pupil at Dedridge Primary School in West Lothian, which calls for disposable water bottles to be replaced with reusable metal bottles: [PE1896 Provide every primary school child in Scotland with a reusable water bottle | Scottish Parliament Website](#).

Callum Isted, the pupil behind this petition, has met with the First Minister to tell her about how he walked the John Muir Way in order to raise money to buy reusable water bottles for his school. I commend him for such an admirable achievement. I want to share Callum's efforts with you.

I know that you will be familiar with legislation requiring that drinking water be made available within schools at all times of the day, including during meal times. Whilst the law requires that drinking water be made available within schools, I recognise there is no legislation or guidance relating to the manner in how drinking water should be provided. The Scottish Government believes that schools are best placed to decide how to provide drinking water to their pupils at the local level. However, I do hope that you can consider Callum's petition, and wider campaigning efforts, to ensure that drinking water can be provided to Scotland's pupils in a sustainable way that is aligned with our shared ambition to tackle – and raise awareness of – the climate emergency that faces the planet.

It is also important to note that the Learning for Sustainability cross-curricular theme encourages schools to take a whole setting approach to sustainability. This means that all school buildings, grounds and policies within the school should support Learning for Sustainability, including making sure the school is taking steps to be more sustainable, which includes reducing the use of plastic.

I am pleased to note that local authorities are already taking a number of positive steps to improve sustainability in relation to the provision of food and drink in schools, including ensuring that water jugs and reusable cups are available in dining halls; using packaging which is made from fully compostable materials such as corn starch; and encouraging pupils to bring their own reusable water bottles to school.

I would like to thank you for your continued work to ensure that sustainable approaches are taken wherever possible when providing

food and drink within schools, helping to reduce both our carbon footprint and impact on the environment.

Yours sincerely,

SHIRLEY-ANNE SOMERVILLE
Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills

Dear Callum

I am writing to update you about your petition to the Scottish Parliament regarding reusable water bottles. It was an absolute pleasure to meet you earlier this year, following the initial consideration of your petition by Parliament. I am very sorry for the delay in writing back to you about this.

I have asked my officials for some advice about your petition and have considered it carefully.

The law says that all schools must make sure that drinking water is available free of charge for all pupils at all times of the day, including at meal times. It is up to each school and local authority to decide how drinking water is provided. This is because we believe that schools are best placed to decide what works best for their pupils. Schools encourage children and young people to bring refillable water bottles, or provide bottles or cups which are either reusable or made of sustainable alternatives to plastic.

My colleague Shirley-Anne Somerville, the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, and I have been particularly impressed by the dedication you have shown towards the aims of your petition, including raising money to buy reusable water bottles for your own school. With this in mind, she has written a letter to the Directors of Education at all local authorities drawing their attention to your petition and encouraging them to use more environmentally-friendly approaches to providing drinking water in their schools. This could include the provision of reusable bottles.

I know that your petition is still open and being considered by the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee at the Scottish Parliament. If you would like to meet me again to discuss further I would be happy for you to email me at firstminister@gov.scot and my office will arrange a suitable date.

In the meantime, the Cabinet Secretary for Educations and Skills has written to the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee to let them know that she has written to the Directors of Education at local authorities about your petition, and that I have written this letter to you.

I am attaching copies of the Cabinet Secretary for Educations and Skills' letters to Directors of Education, and to the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee at the Scottish Parliament, for your

reference, and I would like to wish you and your classmates every success in the future.

NICOLA STURGEON
First Minister of Scotland