

Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills submission of 12 March 2024

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

Thank you for your further letter in relation to the above petition, which seeks to provide a reusable metal water bottle for all children in primary schools. I apologise for the delay in responding.

Firstly, I would like to let the committee know that I met with Callum Isted and his father at the Scottish Parliament on 25 January where we discussed his petition. I informed Callum that I would raise his petition when I meet with Cllr Tony Buchanan who is the spokesperson for children and young people at COSLA.

I note the contents from the official report of the meeting of your committee on 24 January where you discussed potential local authority participation in a national procurement exercise to purchase water bottles for their schools. As you are aware, the work which we carried out at the request of the Committee identified that only 13 of the 32 local authorities would have any interest in a national procurement exercise, with six of those indicating they would do so only if it was centrally funded.

This work also demonstrated that many local authorities already have centrally available water supply points where pupils can top-up their water bottles at any time. Furthermore, some schools are also supplying drinking vessels such as reusable cups or encouraging pupils to re-use their water bottles by topping them up at the available water fountains. Taking account of these responses from local authorities, the Scottish Government does not intend to take forward work on a national procurement exercise at this time.

I am aware that my predecessor as Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, Shirley-Anne Somerville, had previously written to the Directors of Education at all local authorities drawing their attention to Callum's petition. This was done to help reinforce the message, at the highest levels within local authority education departments, that sustainability concerns should be taken into account when providing drinking water within schools.

I believe local authorities should retain the maximum flexibility to decide how they can best meet the needs of the pupils in their respective local areas when it comes to supplying water in schools. Our recent work in this area has provided some helpful evidence of actions which local authorities have already been taking to encourage more sustainability.

Yours sincerely,

JENNY GILRUTH
Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills