

PE1926/L: Expand universal free school meals for all nursery, primary and secondary school pupils

Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills written submission, 28 May 2024

Thank you for your letter of 23 April regarding the Committee's consideration of the above Petition and seeking a further update on the Scottish Government's actions to deliver our programme of free school meals, including a pilot in secondary schools.

When I wrote on 21 August, I reaffirmed our intention to roll out the next phase of our free school meal programme to those in receipt of Scottish Child Payment in Primary 6 and 7. As I have previously informed the Committee, this remains my priority and will help support up to an additional 26,000 children and young people in having access to a nutritious meal as part of the school day.

You are aware that we commissioned the Scottish Futures Trust (SFT) to undertake a data collection exercise to support our discussions and development of future stages of the programme. This exercise concluded in February and allowed SFT to carry out rigorous scrutiny of the data provided by local authorities to ensure information on capital projects is robust. This work has identified that 609 schools need to carry out capital works, which vary in nature and size, to enable the expansion to those recipients of Scottish Child Payment in Primary 6 and 7 to proceed.

Having worked closely with COSLA we agreed the distribution of £10m of capital funding in financial year 2023/24 to local authorities to allow their priority capital works to begin. As part of the 2024/25 budget process I have secured a further £43m capital and £22m resource which will support the roll out of the next stage of the expansion from February 2025. My officials continue to work with COSLA and stakeholders on the roll out of this important stage of the expansion.

The Committee also enquired to progress being made with a pilot for universal free school meals in secondary schools. As mentioned previously, my priority remains to build towards universal free school meals for all primary school pupils however we are considering initial views on a pilot from local authorities. These important areas need serious consideration as we think through the develop of proposals around a pilot. I am eager to ensure that the pilot is developed in conjunction with local authorities to ensure it provides meaningful results and will seek to identify funding to take this work forward. I will happily update the Committee when there is further detail.

I hope that this information is helpful.

JENNY GILRUTH