

The Rt Hon Gavin Williamson MP
Secretary of State for Education
Department for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
20 Great Smith St,
Westminster,
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Philip Glanville, Mayor of Hackney
Cllr Anntoinette Bramble, Deputy
Mayor and Cabinet Member for
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3 April 2020

Dear Gavin,

Free School Meals and provisions for schools during the Covid-19 emergency

We welcome the provision that your Department has put in place to assist local authorities and schools to address food poverty during term time, including the publication of [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): free school meal guidance to schools](#) and the establishment of a weekly shopping voucher to make sure pupils have continued access to free school meals where the pupil is not attending school.

We would, however, urge you to work directly with retailers to widen the range of shops these vouchers can be spent at, including at local food stores and more affordable supermarkets. As you will be aware, at present, these vouchers can only be used at a limited number of outlets, including Sainsbury's, Tesco, Asda, Morrisons, but currently exclude local independent food shops, street markets and supermarkets such as Lidl and Aldi.

In light of government guidance on social distancing and discouraging travel, the exclusion of local food stores from the voucher scheme appears to be a significant omission within the voucher scheme. It also represents a missed opportunity to support local businesses in this challenging economic climate.



At the same time, the exclusion of certain, more affordable supermarkets potentially reduces the relative spending power of these vouchers.

We are now in the Easter break, with the associated challenges over holiday hunger, as a Council we will try to help address this, but many of the traditional routes we do this holiday play schemes, adventure playgrounds and our youth clubs are also closed or operating differently. We would welcome urgent clarity about the support the Government will be making available directly to schools and families during this time to tackle holiday hunger, and detailed plans would need to be put in place if the current crisis continues towards the much longer summer break

In Hackney, working in close partnership with our schools, we are hosting a range of activities including our Easter playscheme for children of key workers and vulnerable children. This will include providing various activities such as arts and crafts, games and cooking.

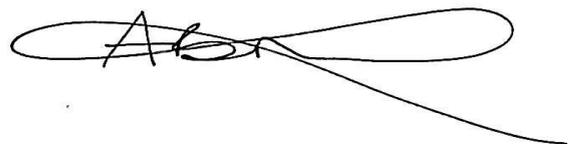
The Council also participates in the Hackney Food Justice Alliance, which supports and co-ordinates the collective work of voluntary, community, private and statutory organisations and local people working to tackle food poverty in Hackney and we are coordinating specific support around Coronavirus through our online support portal here: <https://hackney.gov.uk/coronavirus-support>.

We would welcome urgent clarity from your Department on all these points. Thank you in advance for your assistance. We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,



Philip Glanville
Mayor of Hackney



Cllr Anntoinette Bramble
**Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member
for Education, Young People and
Children's Social Care**

CC: Meg Hillier MP, Member of Parliament for Hackney South and Shoreditch
Rt Hon Diane Abbott MP, Member of Parliament for Hackney North and Stoke Newington

