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Free school meals extended to many families with no recourse to public funds (NRPF)

Dear Headteacher,

I am writing on behalf of Hackney Migrant Centre to ensure you are aware of a welcome recent development extending the criteria for children's entitlement to free school meals.

On 06/04/2020 the law firms, [Matthew Gold & Co](#) (MG & Co), and [Deighton Pierce Glynn](#) (DPG Law) confirmed that the Secretary of State for Education has extended free school meals during the Covid-19 pandemic to many children from families with no recourse to public funds. The following children are now eligible on the condition that their families' income meets the usual threshold for free school meals:

- Children whose families have no recourse to public funds and receive support under [section 17](#) of the Children Act 1989 from their local authority
- Children from families who have been granted leave to remain through the family or private life route subject to a no recourse to public funds restriction
- Children with [Zambrano carers](#) – Zambrano carers are all non-EEA national primary carers of British Citizen children. A person does not need to have their Zambrano rights formally recognised through having a card or documentation in order to be a Zambrano carer
- Children of families receiving [section 4](#) support – Section 4 is support given to some refused asylum seekers

Some things to note are:

'Following our letter, the government has agreed to extend eligibility to children from the following groups, provided their families meet the usual income threshold for free school meals... The Government has said that the extension will be applied for such a period as is considered appropriate in light of the coronavirus crisis.' - MG & Co

'The mechanism under which this will be done is currently unclear, and we will circulate further information as soon as it is available, but families in the above categories should not wait to apply to their local authority for free school meals.' – DPG Law

We are unsure how the income threshold for free school meals will be applied to families in the above groups and are waiting for the DfE to release guidance on this. In the meantime, schools should get in touch with local authorities about how to start providing free school meals support to families who have become eligible for free school meals as result of this change.

If schools have any difficulty receiving the funding that they need to support newly eligible families with no recourse to public funds please contact MG & Co, for families receiving section 4 support please contact DPG Law. We are interested in how schools offering food packages are being supported by the government as well as schools using the voucher scheme.

Hackney Migrant Centre welcomes these changes to the free school meals eligibility criteria. We hope that the DfE will extend eligibility further to allow schools to support every child who needs free school meals permanently.

As schools are well aware, thousands of children from financially disadvantaged families are still not entitled to centrally funded free school meals support. This includes undocumented children whose families do not receive section 17 or section 4 support; many families receiving Universal Credit with a net household income of above £7,400 a year; families who are earning just above the threshold to receive benefits but who are struggling to make ends meet.

A huge thank you to schools for all your hard work during this challenging time, and for the free school meals support that we know you offer to so many children from your own budgets.

Yours sincerely,

Nadia Chalabi
Hackney Migrant Centre School Meals Advocate