

More than half a million children benefitted from healthy food and activities during summer

Hundreds of thousands of children from low-income families are benefitting from healthy food and extra-curricular activities, through programmes helping to level up children's educational outcomes providing better nutrition, and improving wellbeing, behaviour and social skills.

New data from [Childcare Works](#) shows almost half a million children eligible for free school meals received nutritious meals, exercise, enriching activities like music, sports or cooking classes and opportunities to improve their social skills during the summer holidays. The Government's Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) clubs reached over 600,000 children and young people in England in total, and councils are offering clubs for the first time this year over the Christmas break.

Research published today by [Family Action and Magic Breakfast](#) (Wednesday 22 December) shows strong evidence that breakfast clubs – run in schools to provide free, healthy breakfasts to children from low-income families – have had a positive impact on pupils' behaviour, educational attainment and their eating habits. To date, more than 1,200 schools have signed up to the new National School Breakfast Programme to run from next September to 2023, run by Family Action.

Education Secretary Nadhim Zahawi said:

Being healthy and active is a vital part of growing up, and if we want to continue to level up opportunities for every child in the country this must go hand-in-hand with an excellent education.

I'm really encouraged to see the huge numbers of children benefitting from our Holiday Activities and Food programme and the National School Breakfast programme. Both provide not just the benefits of a nutritious meal but also the chance to take part in activities they may not otherwise have exposure to, such as music lessons, cookery classes or the arts.

It's great to see the latest evidence support what we've already seen first-hand in children's lives. I'm grateful to those running holiday clubs this Christmas, and I urge teachers and school staff to sign up to the National School Breakfast Programme.

The [new report](#), published by Family Action and Magic Breakfast, who delivered the government's previous contract for the National School Breakfast Programme between 2019 and 2021, has revealed that of the schools who hosted breakfast clubs:

- 94% felt better supported with their pupil's behaviour;
- 95% found the pupils attending benefitted from better eating habits;
- 94% felt better supported with educational attainment;
- 94% felt better supported with nutrition; and
- 79% found better engagement with parents due to the programme's support.

Backed by up to £24 million over two years, the new breakfast clubs programme, run by Family Action, builds on this positive impact it has already had on participating children and will look to support 2,500 schools up to 2023.

Chief Executive of Family Action, David Holmes CBE said:

A healthy breakfast can make the world of difference to a child at the beginning of the school day. It is so much easier to concentrate and to learn if your tummy is full. Despite all of the challenges schools are facing as the pandemic continues, I am humbled that so many are still finding time to apply for a place on the National School Breakfast Programme. Already more than 1,200 schools have found the time to complete their enrolment process and sign up to the programme.

I urge any eligible school to sign up to the programme while places remain available. Breakfast clubs provide immediate benefits in terms of increased attendance, reduced lateness and improved concentration and behaviour in class – and the national programme is here to help you. Please join us while you still can.

The new numbers on HAF delivery, published by the government's national support partner Childcare Works, come as [funding allocations](#) for 2022 are distributed to each local authority in England for the Government's flagship HAF programme, which will continue to benefit disadvantaged children over the next three years, backed by more than £200 million per year. The funding package was announced by the Chancellor at the Spending Review and the programme will run at Easter, over the summer and at Christmas.

Feedback from parents, and councils, on HAF over the summer includes:

- Parents of children in Birmingham reporting less stress, with 73% saying their children were less likely to engage in anti-social behaviour;
- Parents in East Sussex praising the structure and outdoors activities their HAF provided;
- Providers in North Yorkshire saying children improved their confidence and social skills, becoming more 'vocal and enthusiastic'; and
- Children in Lincolnshire saying this summer holiday has been their 'best ever' due to HAF.

Chief Secretary to the Treasury, Simon Clarke said:

We are committed to levelling up opportunity across the country and

improving access to high quality, affordable childcare. That's why we're building on the success of this year's expanded holiday activities and food programme, by investing over £200 million a year in the programme for the next three years.

I have seen for myself the difference this support makes to children's holiday experiences and to their getting a proper nutritious meal, and it's really powerful.

Jamie Noble, Head of Community at Rotherham Community Sports Trust and HAF provider, said:

I'm really excited for the Christmas delivery of our programme as, through our summer and Easter provisions, I've seen first-hand the amazing benefits that the HAF scheme can have on kids who attend. It was great news for everyone here at Rotherham United Community Sports Trust when we heard the funding had been extended for the next three years, and I'm looking forward to using everything we've learned so far into making this the best edition yet.

The new data confirms that over 495,000 participating in the HAF clubs this summer were eligible for free school meals, with the remainder of the 600,000 attendees considered to be otherwise in need.

HAF clubs – extended to become a national programme in 2021 – provide free activities and meals for children eligible for free school meals, with flexibility for councils about how they can best serve the needs of children and families in their area. The extension of the programme builds on the government's commitment to improve access and outcomes for all children and young people regardless of background, levelling up not just their educational experience but also their extra-curricular opportunities. An independent evaluation, exploring how the programme was implemented and its impact on children, is due to be published in 2022.

Family Action, the government's delivery partner for the current programme running 2021-23, has also revealed that of the 1,200 schools signed up, 800 are already providing the nutritious breakfasts to their pupils.