

Dear Headteacher,

Supporting the Holiday Activities and Food programme this year

I am writing to encourage all schools to support our holiday activities and food (HAF) programme this summer. I know that many schools are already playing a valuable role in this programme, not only by making school premises available for clubs during the holidays, but also by engaging with families so that their children can access the provision.

I am very grateful to all school leaders who are already involved in this programme and would like to offer you my thanks for your hard work. You are making a real difference in improving the lives of children and young people from low-income and vulnerable families over the holiday periods.

This letter provides some information about the HAF programme, and how schools can help make it an even greater success from this summer onwards.

About the programme

The HAF programme provides free holiday club places to children on benefits-related free school meals, as well as other vulnerable children, giving them a chance to enjoy extra-curricular activities and healthy meals during the school holidays.

The school holidays can be pressure points for some families, which for some children can lead to a holiday experience gap. Children from low-income households can be less likely to access organised out-of-school activities, more likely to experience 'unhealthy holidays' in terms of nutrition and physical health and more likely to experience social isolation.

The government is investing over £200m a year to offer these

children free holiday club places with healthy meals and fun activities and during the Easter, summer, and Christmas holidays. Despite the many challenges of the pandemic, I am thrilled that in 2021, the programme was successfully rolled out to all local authorities in England.

A recent independent evaluation showed that our programme reached over 600,000 children and young people in England last summer, meaning hundreds of thousands of children from low-income families are benefitting from healthy food and extra-curricular activities, helping to level up children's educational outcomes, providing better nutrition, improving wellbeing and social skills. Findings from this evaluation also showed that the provision of HAF clubs allowed many parents to stay in employment by offering free childcare for families.

How your school can get involved:

Schools play a crucial role in the HAF programme, and I have seen first-hand many great examples of schools getting involved – for example, by opening up their facilities during holiday periods – giving these children an opportunity to have fun, learn new things, build friendships and ultimately allowing them to have a happier and healthier school holiday.

As we look forward to delivery this summer, I am sure you share my hope that we are able to support even more low-income and vulnerable families and provide children and young people with new experiences that they would not otherwise receive. Here are some practical ways in which your school can support the programme.

- Speaking to your local authority

Every local authority has a HAF co-ordinator, and I would encourage you to make contact. They will be able to provide you with more information on what provision is already available in

your area and advice on how you can support and engage with the programme.

The local authority can also consider with you which children will benefit most from the programme, and work with you to ensure they are offered free holiday club places. There are many benefits for schools if children are attending holiday clubs, as they will be learning, socialising and physically active over the holidays.

- Sharing information with parents

The majority of a child's week is spent at school and the relationships that you and your colleagues have with these families is invaluable. We want to ensure that HAF continues to target the right children and families and I encourage you and your colleagues to continue this work, ensuring that the right families are informed and signposted to accessing HAF provision in their local areas. Your local authority will be able to provide you with information that you can share with eligible parents.

- Running clubs and making school facilities available

Many schools have great facilities that would be suitable for the HAF programme, and I really encourage you and your leaders to consider with your local authority ways in which you could support the programme. Some schools are running their own holiday clubs and are making places available to children on free school meals, which are funded through our central programme. Other schools are making their premises available to local authorities and holiday club providers to provide our programme.

- Promoting existing school holiday clubs

There are a number of simple ways that you could consider in promoting the HAF programme. This year, schools and local

authorities have been using #HAF2022 across social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. It has been heart-warming to see the buzz of activity nationwide and this allows parents and carers to get a taste of the varying activities on offer. I encourage you to take a look at the many examples of how this hashtag has been used.

I am aware schools also have their own existing communication channels that they communicate with parents and carers and so these channels are also strongly encouraged. Collaborating with your local authorities, school governor networks and other platforms are also great ways to see how you could support the programme. Some local authorities have chosen to have dedicated web pages for their HAF programmes which allows them to share blogs, case studies and videos to help engage families.

Once again, I would like to extend my sincere thanks to you and your colleagues for your valuable work with children and families. I look forward to working with you and your colleagues over the coming months to ensure that this summer builds on last year's success, providing children with fantastic opportunities to engage in enriching activities, enjoying healthy food, and having fun.

Yours sincerely,

Will Quince MP
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Children and Families