



Reading Borough Council

Holiday, Activities and Food Programme (HAF)

2025 Annual Report

Introduction to the Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme

The Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme is a Department for Education funded initiative designed to support children and young people who are eligible for free school meals (FSM) by providing access to high-quality holiday provision. The programme ensures that children receive nutritious meals, engaging activities, and opportunities for learning and social development during school holiday periods.

Reading Borough Council has continued to deliver HAF across Easter, summer and winter holiday periods, working collaboratively with schools, community organisations, and specialist providers. The 2025/26 programme has focused on maintaining strong participation levels, widening access for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), and ensuring activities are inclusive, enriching, and of high quality.

Benefits of HAF and target groups

The HAF programme supports children and families experiencing socio-economic disadvantage by addressing holiday hunger, inactivity, and social isolation. Key benefits include:

- Access to healthy, nutritious food during the school holidays
- Opportunities for physical activity, creativity, and enrichment
- Improved wellbeing, confidence, and social skills
- Support for working families and parents during holiday periods.

The primary target group is children eligible for free school meals; however, Reading Borough Council has also extended access through referrals to ensure support reaches:

- Children with SEND
- Children attending Alternative Provision (AP) settings
- Families facing short-term financial hardship or vulnerability.



Eligibility rates across settings highlight levels of need:

- **Primary Schools:** 22.46% FSM eligibility
- **Secondary Schools:** 16.25% FSM eligibility
- **Nurseries:** 23.83% FSM eligibility
- **Special Schools:** 47.57% FSM eligibility
- **Alternative Provision:** 54.54% FSM eligibility

Children in Alternative Provision are significantly more likely to be eligible for FSM due to higher levels of socio-economic disadvantage, the prevalence of SEND (77.1% compared to 14.4% in mainstream schools), and barriers to FSM registration. These factors continue to inform commissioning and targeting approaches within Reading.

Nutritional, educational, enrichment and physical activity offer

All HAF-funded provision in Reading is required to deliver:

- **Nutritious food:** Balanced meals and snacks that align with School Food Standards, with many providers offering freshly prepared or home-cooked food
- **Physical activity:** Sport, games, movement and outdoor activity promoting physical health and active lifestyles
- **Enrichment activities:** Creative, cultural, and skills-based activities including music, theatre, technology, and arts
- **Educational elements:** Opportunities to reinforce learning, build confidence, and develop life skills in a non-classroom setting.

Providers such as Reading FC, Rock Academy, Rabble, Next Thing, and Grassrootz exemplify the breadth and quality of the HAF offer, ensuring children are fully engaged and supported throughout each programme.

SEND provision

SEND remains a strategic priority for Reading Borough Council. Dedicated and inclusive provision has been strengthened through:

- Specialist SEND providers such as **Make Sense**, delivering highly tailored activities for children with profound and complex needs
- Enhanced provider training and SEND-awareness
- Plans to further expand capacity through partnerships with **Reading Play** and **Chance to Dance**.



Quality Assurance visits consistently highlighted the exceptional care, creativity, and professionalism within SEND provision, ensuring safety, inclusion, and meaningful engagement for children and their families.

Booking system

Parent and family journey (what users do)

Eligibility and vouchers

Families, typically those with children eligible for free school meals, receive a HAF voucher or unique booking code via schools or direct communication (email/text). This voucher enables access to funded holiday sessions through the central booking system.

Provider journey

Approved providers use the system to:

- Create activity listings (dates, times, capacity, location)
- Manage bookings and registers
- Record daily attendance
- Access key participant information including medical and SEND flags
- Communicate directly with parents and carers.

Reading Borough Council's role

The Council oversees the programme by:

- Approving providers and activities
- Setting and managing eligibility criteria
- Allocating vouchers and credits
- Monitoring uptake, attendance, spend, and outcomes
- Generating mandatory reports for the Department for Education.

Eligible children (FSM) trend in Reading

- **2023:** 5,235 children
- **2024 (April):** 4,827 children
- **2025 (January):** 5,244 children

Overall trend: High and rising demand.



- Approximately **38% increase since 2020**, from around 3,800 to 5,244 children.
- While some fluctuation is evident, eligibility has remained consistently above 5,000 children, reinforcing the importance of sustained HAF delivery.

Programme performance and participation (2025)

Winter 2025

Spaces offered	2155		
Spaces booked	2017	93%	
Spaces used	1532	76%	
Unique children attended	645		
Number of providers	15		
% of Schools involved	100%		

Summer 2025

Spaces offered	11041		
Spaces booked	10519	95%	
Spaces used	7568	71%	
Unique children attended	1449	5.2	
Number of providers	20		
% of Schools Involved	100%		

Easter 2025

Spaces offered	3095		
Spaces booked	2882	93%	



Spaces used	2408	83%	
Unique children attended	1042	2.3	
Number of providers	16		
% of Schools involved	100%		

These figures demonstrate strong demand, high booking rates, and sustained engagement across all holiday periods.

Quality Assurance (QA)

Reading Borough Council conducted Quality Assurance visits to all providers to ensure safe, structured, and high-quality delivery. Highlights include:

- **Premier Education:** Engaging sports programme with excellent facilities
- **Funtastic:** Creative, high-quality delivery within a highly deprived community
- **Grassrootz:** Innovative community-based delivery with a strong youth mentoring element
- **Little Musketeers:** Highly attended fencing and sports programme
- **Make Sense:** Outstanding SEND provision with inspirational staff and tailored activities
- **Next Thing:** Well-structured tech camp with popular home-cooked food
- **Rabble & Reading Rep:** Creative and theatrical provision encouraging self-expression
- **Weller Centre:** A vital community provision providing consistent, nurturing support.

Overall, QA visits confirmed a consistently high standard of delivery across the programme.

Spend and costs (2025)

- **Easter 2025:** £70,278.63
- **Summer 2025:** £295,359.70



- **Winter 2025:** £73,981.25
- **Capital Costs:** £1,445.12
- **Booking system costs:** £8,039.00

Spending reflects the scale of delivery and prioritisation of frontline provision, with robust systems in place to monitor value for money.

Parent feedback and impact

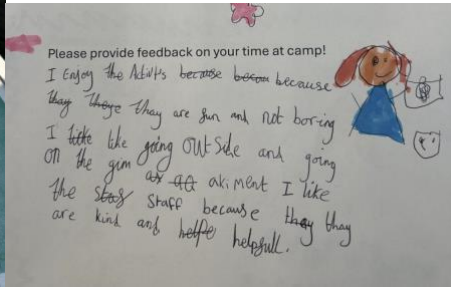
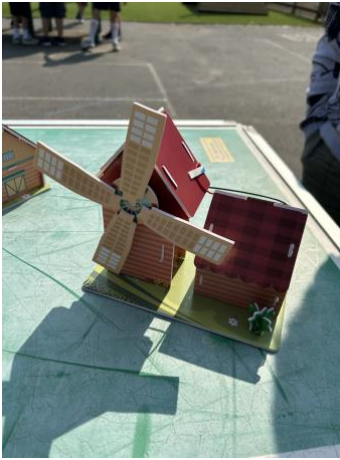
The impact of HAF on children and families is evidenced through qualitative feedback. One parent shared:

“Coming to camp has made my child feel happier meeting new friends and interacting with adults. Initially anxious, they grew in confidence each session and came home every day excited to talk about their favourite part of the day.”

Parents highlighted:

- Improved social skills and confidence
- Positive behaviour changes supported by consistent praise
- High-quality, kind, and professional staff communication
- Tangible achievements celebrated through awards such as ‘Star of the Day’.

These experiences demonstrate the meaningful outcomes HAF delivers beyond attendance alone.



Partnerships & community

We were delighted to run our annual summer donation drive in partnership with Reading Bid. This year we extended our offering outside of children eligible through the HAF programme. This year the groups we were collecting for were:

- Unaccompanied asylum seekers
- Young carers
- Care leavers
- HAF
- 0-5s

The donations collected amounted to nearly 100 boxes and included items such as clothes, school starter kits, hygiene products and food among other things.



Below are some of the donations collected and stored at Dee Space.



Below is a pack NSSport put together which they gave to all children on their HAF camp.



This was one of our local businesses and their donations.



Strategic areas of focus and next steps

The continuation and extension of HAF funding has enabled Reading Borough Council to:

- Maintain year-on-year delivery across all major holiday periods
- Expand the range and scale of activities offered
- Strengthen SEND provision and specialist support
- Invest in quality assurance, monitoring, and reporting systems.

This sustained investment has supported a consistently high level of demand and uptake, reflecting the ongoing cost-of-living pressures faced by families across the borough.

Increasing SEND provision

- Recruit additional specialist providers
- Expand partnerships with Reading Play and Chance to Dance
- Ensure equitable access and appropriate support for all families.

Commissioning for summer 2026

- Retain high-performing providers
- Expand geographic reach across the borough
- Increase culturally representative and community-led offers.



Conclusion

The 2025/26 HAF programme in Reading Borough Council continues to play a critical role in supporting children and families during school holidays. With high demand, strong provider performance, and clear positive outcomes, the programme remains an essential component of the borough's early help and child wellbeing offer. Future development will focus on inclusion, quality, and sustainable growth to meet continuing need.