

Annual Report 2025

Cambridgeshire Holiday Activities and Food Programme

Foreword

The Cambridgeshire HAF Programme has continued to grow and strengthen throughout 2025, delivering high-quality, inclusive holiday provision to children and families across the county. Demand for the programme remains strong, with over 3,100 children accessing provision during the summer alone, and a 21% increase in participation at Christmas, reflecting the value families place on the support offered.

A key priority this year has been improving inclusion and access for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) or additional needs. We have seen continued progress, with SEND participation reaching 20% in Summer 2025, alongside the successful expansion of specialist provision, including our partnership with Castle School. This work is complemented by increased confidence and capability with our wider providers to meet a diverse range of needs.

The programme has also broadened its offer, welcoming new providers and creating a wider range of opportunities for children and young people, including activities for secondary school participants to support independence, wellbeing, and engagement.

These achievements are underpinned by the dedication of our providers, partners, and HAF team, whose commitment ensures families receive safe, enriching, and supportive experiences. We remain focused on building on this success in 2026, continuing to strengthen quality, inclusion, and reach across the programme.

Annette Brooker

*Head of Early Years, Childcare and School Readiness Service
Cambridgeshire County Council*

“ It’s all perfect,
so well run...
nothing needs to
change apart from
more days. ”
Child



Introduction

The HAF Programme is a nationally funded initiative supporting children in receipt of benefits-related free school meals during school holidays. It provides healthy meals and enriching activities, through partnerships with local organisations. Since its rollout in 2021 HAF has delivered millions of places across England, helping to reduce holiday hunger and improve wellbeing.

The programme has strengthened local collaboration and increased access to inclusive childcare provision. It has also supported children's confidence, social skills, and engagement, while offering families wider guidance and support. HAF plays a vital role in tackling inequalities and promoting positive outcomes year-round.

Cambridgeshire County Council (CCC) also offer a wider eligibility criteria, focussed on economic support to families. Visit the [Cambridgeshire Parents HAF webpage](#) for further details.

There are many benefits for children who attend the HAF programme which include:

- receiving healthy and nutritious meals
- maintaining a healthy level of physical activity
- being happy, having fun and meeting new friends
- developing a greater understanding of food, nutrition and other health related issues
- taking part in fun and engaging activities that support their development and well-being
- feeling safe and secure
- getting access to the right support services
- returning to school feeling engaged and ready to learn

Please watch our HAF video!



Eat Healthily

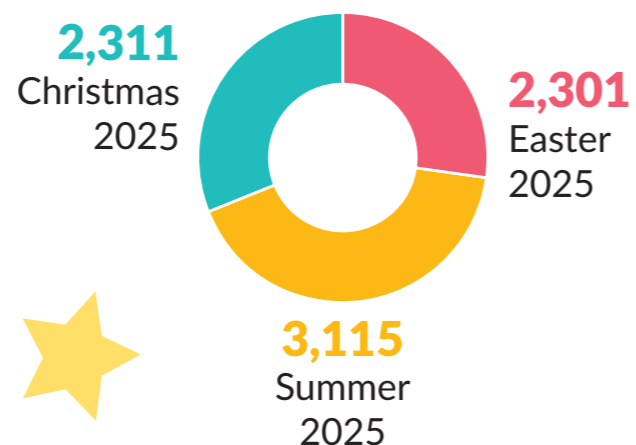


“ My children had the best time, so many fun activities and the staff go above and beyond. ”
Parent

Cambridgeshire HAF Programme 2025

The Easter programme saw strong engagement from families and marked the successful pilot of provision at Castle School, Cambridge, the programme's first partnership with a special school. Positive feedback from school leadership led to this being embedded within the ongoing HAF offer. Provision was also expanded to include theatre schools, additional playschemes, and outdoor learning opportunities, increasing both capacity and variety. Parent and child feedback highlighted the value of the programme: Child: 'I really enjoyed my time at the Fitzwilliam Museum. The activities are always so fun.', Parent: 'Really appreciate these clubs as it means I can still get on and work to earn money, knowing my boys are very happy, safe and very well looked after in the holidays'

Demand for the HAF Programme remained highest during the summer holidays, with 3,115 unique children attending and accessing up to 64 hours of provision. This reflects sustained demand for supportive holiday provision. Positive outcomes included increased confidence, independence, and social connection among children and young people. Feedback from families remained highly positive, with children reporting enjoyment of friendships and activities, and parents noting increased independence and new experiences. Child: 'I like all my friends here and look forward to seeing them at holidays.',



Total unique children participating in 2025

Parent: 'My son gained independence, making new friends outside of his current group, learning new experiences'

The Christmas programme saw a 21% year-on-year increase in participation (an additional 400 children), demonstrating growing engagement. A broad and diverse offer was delivered including family experiences such as theatre trips, swimming and roller skating and holiday schemes. Additional funding enabled holiday scheme providers to deliver enriched experiences, including performances and themed activities. Feedback highlighted high satisfaction with the variety and quality of opportunities available. Parent: 'Both children enjoyed the variety of things we did. Two were new experiences and it was good to see them smile', Parent: 'Love that there are different activities being added to appeal for all'.



“Had best time ever. Got to play and learn new things and I made new friends.”

Child

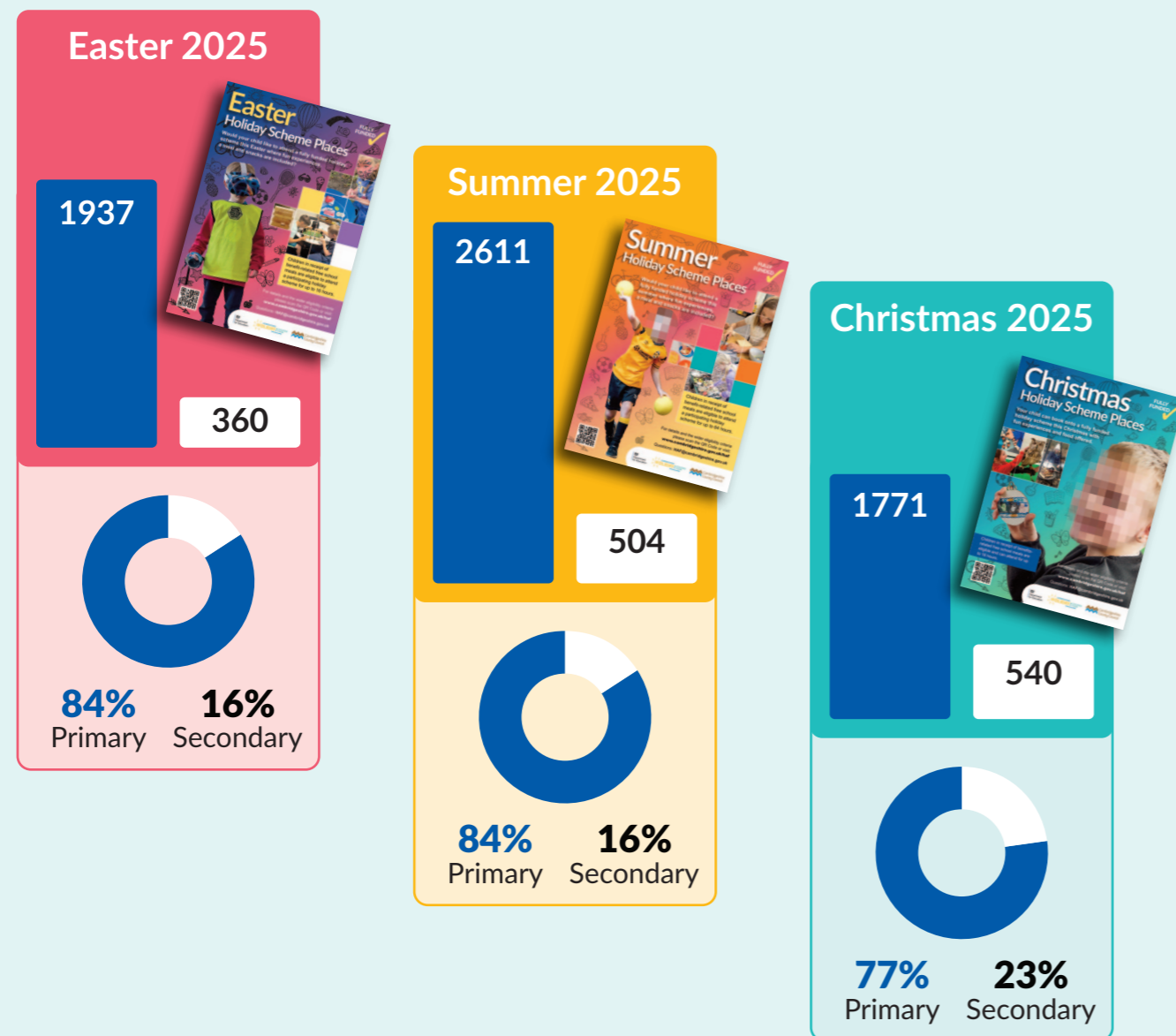
Participation of primary and secondary school children

Participation in the HAF Programme remains highest among primary-aged children, reflecting in part on the greater childcare needs of this age group. However, increasing engagement of secondary-aged young people remains a key priority. During 2025, targeted efforts to broaden the offer for older children resulted in improved uptake, particularly within the Christmas programme.

Young people demonstrated increased independent participation in a range of enriching activities, including roller skating at Skaters in Wisbech and swimming sessions at One Leisure sites

in St Ives, Ely, and Cambridge. Little Miracles expanded their offer to include a youth scheme which was well received. These opportunities supported positive outcomes such as increased physical activity, social engagement, and independence.

The continued development of age-appropriate, flexible provision has strengthened the programme's ability to engage secondary-aged participants, contributing to a more balanced and inclusive HAF offer across all age groups. This will remain a focus into 2026.



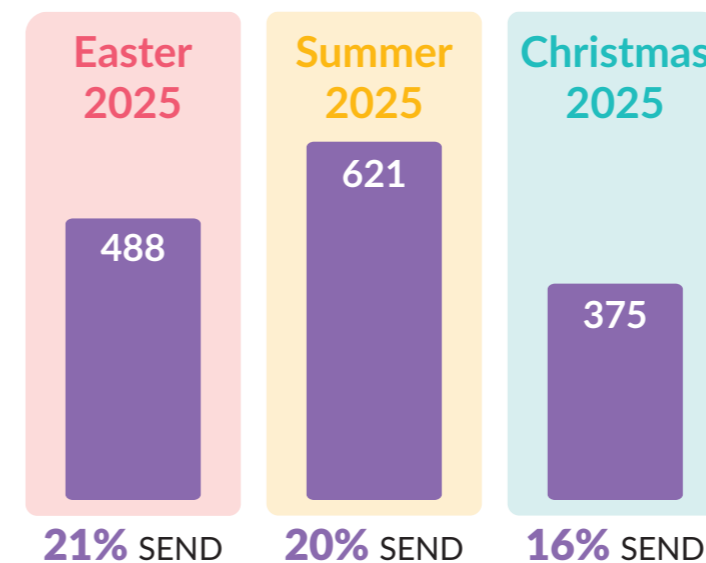
Participation of children with SEND or additional needs

Participation of children with SEND or additional needs increased to 20% in Summer 2025 (the most popular programme of the year), up from 18% in Summer 2024, demonstrating continued progress in improving access and inclusion across the HAF Programme. Specialist provision, such as the Castle Special School holiday scheme, delivered strong outcomes, providing valuable respite for families while enabling children with SEND to access inclusive, high-quality holiday experiences.

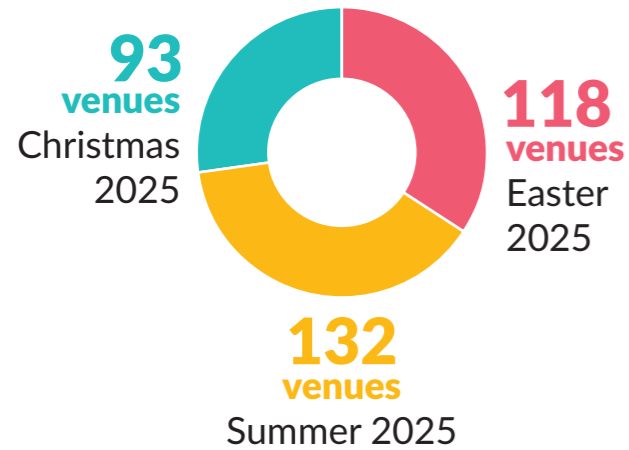
The programme continued to strengthen its specialist SEND offer through partnerships with a range of experienced providers, including Inspire Holiday Club, Little Miracles, Castle Special School, Next Thing Education, Sandy Hill Community Project, Clip N Climb, and Laser Tag @ Zapt.

In parallel, universal providers were supported through guidance and cross-service working with Early Years, Childcare and School Readiness colleagues to build confidence and capability in inclusive practice. This has led to improved planning with families, increased use of reasonable adjustments, and greater participation of children with additional needs across mainstream HAF provision.

“I always feel that my daughter is cherished here. Her skills are encouraged and she is appreciated in all her uniqueness. She is offered highly nutrient dense, fresh, unprocessed food and is always included despite her SEND needs.”
Parent



Providers delivering the HAF Programme



The Cambridgeshire HAF Programme benefits from a wide range of providers, strengthened through a rigorous due diligence process that ensures all providers meet robust safeguarding and quality standards prior to and throughout registration.

Ongoing support, monitoring, and training enable providers to consistently meet these expectations, resulting in safe, inclusive, and enriching experiences for children and young people across the county. Investment in workforce development remains a key priority. Through a comprehensive programme of fully funded training, including safeguarding, inclusion, equality, health and safety, and playwork, HAF providers have developed increased confidence, skills, and capacity to deliver high-quality provision.

During 2025, the programme continued to expand by successfully onboarding new providers, increasing diversity of opportunities available to families. This included Chorus Music, who provided creative, music-based activities that supported children's confidence, self-expression, and engagement.

“The holiday club is run very well, everyone is always kept informed of events being held and it makes it more fun.”

Child



- 20Twenty Productions
- Abbey Leisure Pool
- Abington Annexe Community Childcare
- Active Play Education
- All Seasons Children's Play
- Barneys Club
- Barracudas
- Bassingbourn Out of School Club
- Butterflies Forest School
- Cambridge Ice Arena
- Cambridge Junction
- Cambridge Kids Club
- Cambridge United Foundation
- Cambridgeshire Music
- CamPlay Holiday Club
- Careclubs
- Castle School
- Clip 'n Climb
- Colman Creative Academy
- Come and Play
- Crackerjacks Out of School Club
- Crosshall Kids Club
- Fireflies Forest School
- Football Fun Factory
- Fourfields Community Primary School
- Fun Times
- Fusion Family and Youth Projects
- Grafham Water Centre
- Grow With Us
- Happy Hens Childcare
- Hunts District Council: One Leisure
- Inspire Holiday Club
- It's a wrap
- JDK Holiday Club
- JLR Play
- Joanna Bucka Childminder
- JS Sports & Education
- Junior Adventures Group
- Just Do Sport
- KD Theatre Productions
- Kids Club Ely
- Kids R Us
- KidZone
- Limitless Sports & Activities
- Little Explorers
- Little Hands
- Little Miracles Charity
- Lucy Hills Childcare
- MACCA Sports Academies
- Make Lunch Linton
- Naomi Mullen Childminder
- Next Thing Education
- Norwich City Football Club
- Oak Activities
- Parkside Pool
- Premier Education
- Prestige Sports Development
- Ramsey Neighbourhood Trust
- Romsey Mill
- Sandy Hill Community Project Centre
- Shepreth Wildlife Park
- Skateboard Cambridge
- Skaters Wisbech
- Smarties Holiday Club
- Spectrum @ Morley Primary
- Sport2Day
- Sunnyside Holiday Club
- The DX Club
- The Fitzwilliam Museum
- The Hive Leisure Pool
- The Kite Trust
- The Library Presents
- The Newcroft Club
- Theatretrain
- Tiny Tykes Childcare
- TJ Kids
- University of Cambridge Holiday Playscheme
- Waterbeach After School Play Scheme
- Wisbech Adventure Playground
- Yaxley Out of School Club
- Young Technicians Academy
- Youth Dreams Project
- Youths of Fenland
- Zapt Laser Tag

Increasing awareness of healthy eating, healthy lifestyles and positive behaviours

HAF providers continued through 2025 to increase awareness of healthy eating, lifestyles and positive behaviours through their day-to-day practice. This can be through planned activities or spontaneous discussions over snack or mealtimes with regards to the food being eaten. Planned activities include involving children in planning and preparing meals and snacks, discussions regarding the nutritional content of meals and ingredients and the broader narrative of keeping healthy.

During summer 2025 HAF Programme, we partnered with the Public Health Team to support their Oral Health initiative. A total of 1,500 dental packs were distributed across 28 HAF providers, 21 of whom also receiving interactive oral health sessions. These sessions engaged children in fun, educational activities around toothbrushing and hygiene, sparking valuable conversations and positive behavioural changes. Feedback from providers highlighted the initiative's impact, noting children's enthusiasm for the dental packs and increased awareness of oral health. One child proudly shared their 'extra shiny teeth' the following day – demonstrating how the resources encouraged immediate action and pride in self-care.

Signposting and referrals

The HAF team developed a comprehensive signposting document to enable providers to effectively connect families with relevant, timely support, including financial, wellbeing and community services. This is underpinned by close partnership working with Cambridgeshire County Council's Anti-Poverty Strategic Lead, ensuring alignment with wider anti-poverty priorities and access to a broad, current offer of local and national support. This strategic collaboration further supports the ongoing embedding and delivery of the Crisis and Resilience Fund, strengthening a coordinated system of support for families through into 2026.



2025 HAF budget spend

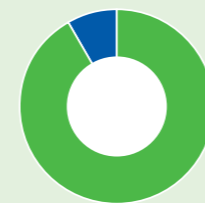
HAF **grant received** from the Department for Education:

£1,936,190

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Overall **expenditure** for the Cambridgeshire HAF Programme:

£1,936,190



The proportion of funding spent on Administration: **£174,126** (9% of The HAF grant)

Breakdown of administrative spend:

Staffing	£171,342
Travel and subsistence	£1,333
Professional development	£820

“The best part was seeing my child enjoy a variety of activities in a safe and supportive environment while spending quality time during the Christmas holidays.”

Parent

The HAF steering group

- Early Years, Childcare and School Readiness Service: Senior Management Lead
- Finance and Resources Lead
- Place Planning Children, Education and Families Education Welfare Benefits Lead
- Families Information Service Lead
- Communities Service Lead
- Communications and Information Team Lead
- Public Health Lead

Cambridgeshire HAF Programme contacts:

HAF Programme Lead:

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Butterflies Forest School

Supporting children with SEND

Butterflies Forest School, co-founded by Sarah-Jane, delivers inclusive, nature-based provision with a strong focus on wellbeing, confidence, and child-led outdoor learning. Through HAF, the team has developed significant expertise in supporting children with SEND.

Child A first attended aged five. He is autistic and, at the time, non-verbal, requiring consistent one-to-one support and a highly adaptable approach. With financial support from the HAF Programme, Butterflies adapted staffing, communication methods, and activities to ensure full inclusion.

The forest school environment proved highly effective. Child A engaged in 100% of sessions attended and participated in a broad range of activities, including outdoor play, sensory exploration, and group experiences. Over time, he achieved key milestones, including joining group songs, engaging in shared activities, and celebrating events with peers. Makaton was embedded across sessions, with staff and children learning key signs, resulting in improved peer interaction and inclusion.

Outcomes for Child A include measurable improvements in communication (progressing from non-verbal to using emerging spoken language alongside Makaton),

increased confidence, and sustained engagement in group activities. Attendance remained consistent across multiple HAF programmes, with positive transitions into each session.

This work has also delivered wider impact: staff confidence in SEND practice has increased, enabling the provision of one-to-one and two-to-one support for multiple children, and peer awareness of inclusive communication has strengthened. Parent feedback highlights increased trust and reduced barriers to accessing holiday provision.

