FAQs for Schools

Hertfordshire's Holiday Activity Programme

HAPpy

BEST START IN LIFE Funded by UK Government

1. What is the HAPpy programme?

Across every local authority in England, the **Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme** provides support to children from low-income families during school holiday periods. Eligibility for HAF is directly linked to a child's registration for free school meals (FSM)

In Hertfordshire HAF is known as the **HAPpy: Holiday Activity Programme.**

2. Who funds the programme?

The programme is funded by the UK Government via the Department for Education (DfE).

3. What is the aim of the HAF programme?

The aim of HAF is to support children from low-income families during school holidays by providing:

- **Hot Healthy meals** – ensuring children who normally receive free school meals still get nutritious food outside term time.
- **Enriching activities** – such as sports, arts, trips, and learning sessions that promote physical and mental wellbeing.
- **Social opportunities** – helping children stay engaged, make friends, and avoid isolation during breaks.
- **Support for families** – including advice on nutrition, budgeting, and accessing local services.

4. Who is eligible?

School age children from **Reception to Year 11** who are in receipt of **Targeted free school meals** (T-FSM).

5. What is 'TARGETED' free school meals?

From September 2026 there have been **national changes** to the **benefits based free school meals** system.

Children eligible for free school meals (FSM) will now fall under two categories:

Targeted FSM - Free school meals for children in households with household income below £7,400 per year. **This group remains eligible for HAF/ HAPpy camps.**

Expanded FSM - FSM will also be available to all children from households in receipt of Universal Credit who have a household income of more than £7,400 per year. **This group is not eligible for HAF/ HAPpy camps.**

Important - The eligibility of each pupil for FSM has been re-assessed for the 2026-27 school year. This means some children who previously attend HAPpy will no longer be eligible from September 2026, if their family circumstances mean they no longer meet the Targeted FSM threshold.

6. All children in Key Stage 1 get free school meals – are they eligible for HAPpy?

All children (regardless of family income/ benefits) receive Universal Infant Free School Meals in KS1 - **this does not count for HAPpy Camps**.

Infant pupils who receive a free meal under UIFSM **must also meet the eligibility for Targeted free school meals (T-FSM)** to be able to access a place on the HAF programme. Infants who register successfully for Targeted free school meals will also bring additional government funding to their school via the **Pupil Premium** for disadvantaged pupils.

7. Can you explain FSM eligibility in a simpler way?

This table shows the **household income thresholds** for the different types of free school meals and eligibility for linked benefits in Hertfordshire. A **printable version for staff or families** can be found **here**.

Changes to Free School Meals Eligibility

From September 2026 the eligibility for free school meals (FSM) has changed. Children from households in receipt of Universal Credit will be entitled to receive FSM. Check your child's FSM eligibility and additional benefits below.

Questions about FSM? Contact your child's school



	Targeted free school meals (T-FSM)	Expanded free school meals (E-FSM)	Universal Infant free school meals (UIFSM)
Benefits-based	✓	✓	✗
Eligibility Check for Pupils	In households in receipt of Universal Credit, with **annual household earnings of £7,400 or less.**	In households in receipt of Universal Credit, with **annual household earnings over £7,400.**	No eligibility checks are required for UIFSM *
The child will get Free Meals at School	✓	✓	✓
Registration required on Local Authority website	✓	✓	✗ **
Other benefits or entitlements for the child	Herts Card and HAPpy: Holiday Activity Programme	Herts Card	Must register for T-FSM or E-FSM to receive benefits **
Pupil Premium Funding for the child's school ££	✓	✗	✗

* All pupils in reception, year 1 and year 2, in state-funded schools, regardless of household earnings, are entitled to UIFSM.
** If the household is in receipt of Universal Credit, then eligibility should be checked for T-FSM or E-FSM and a registration made.

Other households may also be entitled to FSM (if receiving income-related Employment and Support Allowance, the guaranteed element of Pension Credit, or families with no recourse to public funds). If this applies to you, please contact your child's school office for advice.

HAPpy: Holiday Activity programme
To access the HAPpy holiday programmes, children must now meet the new **Targeted FSM threshold**.

The FSM eligibility change means some children who previously accessed the HAPpy: Holiday Activity Programme will no longer be eligible to attend after Sept 2026.

Visit HAPpy

Herts Card
This card gives discounts to children from low income families for lots of activities and days out that they might not be able to access otherwise.

Visit Herts Card

Need Help to Manage the Cost of Living?
For help and advice please visit the Help to manage the cost of living page on the Hertfordshire County Council website.

Visit Cost of Living

Information applies to residents of Hertfordshire only | Source: UK Government | Published: Nov 2026 for HAPpy: Holiday Activity Programme

8. Does a child who has diagnosed SEND, an EHCP or an additional needs support plan, automatically qualify for the programme?

The automatic qualification for the HAF programme is **children in receipt of Targeted free school meals**. If a child has an EHCP or SEND but is **not in receipt of Targeted free school meals**, then they would **not automatically qualify**. See section 17 for information on referrals for non-eligible children.

9. When does the programme run?

The HAPpy programme runs in the 3 core school holiday periods – Spring (Easter), Summer and Winter (Christmas). The HAPpy programme does not run during half-term breaks.

10. How long do camps last?

Camps last a minimum of 4 hours. Some camps run for just one day, others for multiple days.

11. What does a HAPpy camp include?

Each camp will include a minimum of an hour of physical activity, a minimum of an hour of enrichment activities, an opportunity to learn about healthy lifestyles and a hot meal.

12. How do eligible families receive information about the programme?

Eligible families will now receive their unique code directly from the new HAPpy Booking system. The email containing the child's booking code will come from an @hertfordshire.gov.uk email address. This is a no-reply system email, please do not use it for communications.

13. How can our school help families to access HAPpy Camps?

In the weeks leading up to the school holidays, we ask every school in Hertfordshire to:

- Ensure that all staff are informed about the changes to FSM eligibility
- Understand the changes in eligibility for the **HAPpy programme – Targeted FSM only**
- Be ready to **check a child's FSM status** for their parent or guardian – each child should be checked individually as there are circumstances where siblings will not have the same entitlement
- Be prepared to explain to a parent or guardian their child's current FSM registration status and any associated benefits linked to this
- Check that all siblings in a family have been registered if they are eligible for FSM

14. Our school isn't hosting a HAPpy camp, why should we be interested in this?

Eligible **children can attend any Happy Camp in Hertfordshire** that is suitable for their age and needs. It is important that all eligible families are given **the opportunity to engage with the HAPpy provision** nearest to them, even if it isn't running at their own child's school.

HAPpy camps support children's **health, happiness, learning, and social development** — while easing pressure on families during school breaks

Benefits for families include:

- **Reduced food costs** during holidays
- **Affordable childcare support** so parents can work or manage responsibilities
- **Guidance and resources** about nutrition, budgeting, and local services
- **Peace of mind** knowing children are in a safe, supervised environment

15. How do eligible families book on to the HAPpy programme

Parents of eligible children will be sent a unique booking code that can be used to book any HAPpy camp which is suitable for the age and needs of the child/young person. This booking code is sent directly to the parent/ guardian of eligible children from an @hertfordshire.gov.uk email address.

16. We have a family who doesn't automatically qualify, is there a way for them to access the programme?

If the school/professional working with the family believes that a non-eligible young person would benefit from attending the HAPpy programme, they must submit a request to be referred into the programme.

17. Can we refer pupils who are not automatically eligible?

There is a discretionary **15% of funding** to offer free or subsidised places to children **not receiving Targeted FSM**. Places are allocated by referral and assessed on a case-by-case basis for those who would benefit.

Priority for referrals is given to children from low-income families who cannot afford to pay for holiday provision. Unless there are exceptional circumstances, a referral will only be approved **if the child is eligible and registered for free school meals under the new Expanded category.** See sections 5 & 7 for details.

Applications may be considered from but not limited to include **children receiving Expanded FSM** who are:

- vulnerable or in need
- looked-after
- on child protection or support plans
- with SEND or supported by services
- a young carer

18. How do we make a referral for a non-FSM pupil?

Only a professional working with the child/family can make a referral. Please contact the HSP Team via haf@herts.ac.uk to discuss submitting a referral and gain access to the link to complete the referral form.

19. Who do we contact if we have a question?

If your question is regarding an eligible family not receiving their unique codes – **please ask the parent or guardian to complete our booking support form** (or complete the form on their behalf).

The form allows us to understand the question and respond promptly. **This is the best way for a parent to contact us.**

HAPpy Booking Support Form link: https://forms.cloud.microsoft/e/WKXqjKe180

If you (a representative of the school) needs to speak to a member of the HAPpy coordination team regarding a specific camp, child or referral, please contact the HAPpy Team at HSP via haf@herts.ac.uk

Contact Details

In Hertfordshire, the HAF programme is coordinated by the Herts Sport & Physical Activity Partnership (HSP)

Please visit our website for more information about HAPpy Camps https://sportinherts.org.uk/happy

If you have a question about the HAPpy programme, please email: haf@herts.ac.uk or Tel: 01707 284 229