What is Essex ActivAte?

Essex ActivAte is the name for the government funded Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme delivered by Active Essex across Essex and Thurrock on behalf of the Department for Education (DfE). The programme provides free holiday clubs, healthy meals and enriching activities for eligible children and young people during the easter, summer and winter school holidays.

New Free School Meal (FSM) Eligibility Changes

The DfE has announced that, from September 2026, FSM eligibility will be expanded, enabling more families receiving Universal Credit to access free school meals.

As part of this change, there are now two FSM categories: *Targeted Free School Meals and Expanded Free School Meals*. While this broadens access to FSM support, eligibility for the Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme remains restricted to children eligible for **Targeted Free School Meals.**

As a result, not all children receiving Free School Meals under the expanded criteria will be eligible for a funded Essex ActivAte holiday club place.

Local authorities and partners play an important role in ensuring families receive clear and consistent information about these changes, including the difference between Targeted FSM and Expanded FSM, and what this means for access to alternative support.

Who Can Access Essex ActivAte?

Essex ActivAte is aimed at two main target audiences who can access funded holiday club places through the Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme.

Primary Target Audience (85% of funded places)

- Children and young people who are eligible for **Targeted FSM.**

Targeted FSM currently applies to children from households receiving Universal Credit with annual earned income of **£7,400 or less**. Whilst FSM eligibility has recently expanded, only children meeting the Targeted FSM criteria are automatically eligible for Essex ActivAte funded places.

These families will receive a **HolidayActivities voucher code** by email or text through their child's school ahead of the Easter, Summer and Winter holiday periods to book funded places at local Essex ActivAte holiday clubs.

Secondary Target Audience (15% of funded places)

- Children and young people who may be eligible for **Expanded FSM** or who would benefit from additional support during the school holidays.

This may include children and young people who:

- Are from low-income households or experiencing financial hardship
- Are vulnerable or would benefit from additional support during the school holidays
- May be at risk of inactivity, social isolation or reduced access to opportunities
- Meet other locally agreed HAF eligibility criteria

These places are typically accessed through referrals from schools or other supporting services, although self-referral may be available during some holiday periods.

Please note: Children receiving **Expanded FSM** are not automatically eligible for an Essex ActivAte funded place or HolidayActivities voucher code and may need to access a place through the referral pathway.

Key Messages for Families

When speaking to families, please help us communicate that:

- More children may now qualify for Free School Meals (FSM) during term time.
- Essex ActivAte funded places are primarily available to children eligible for Targeted Free School Meals (FSM).
- Eligible families will receive a HolidayActivities voucher code through their school ahead of the Easter, Summer and Winter holiday periods.
- Families who are unsure whether their child is eligible should contact their child's school or check the GOV.UK Free School Meals eligibility guidance.
- A limited number of referral-funded places are available for other eligible children and young people who may benefit from additional support during the school holidays.
- Receiving Free School Meals does not automatically guarantee an Essex ActivAte funded place or voucher code, so families should check their eligibility with their school.

What Should Families Do?

If a child is eligible for Targeted FSM:

- Look out for a HolidayActivities voucher code from their school ahead of each HAF holiday.
- Use the code to book free, local Essex ActivAte holiday activities.

If a child is eligible for Expanded FSM and may require support:

- Speak to their school or supporting services about referral-funded places.
- Discover low cost and free activities, family support, guidance and resources on the Essex ActivAte Family Support Hub.

For questions about eligibility, referrals or booking processes, please contact:
haf@activeessex.org

Or simply head over to our website: https://www.activeessex.org/children-young-people/essex-activate/

Thank you for helping us ensure funded holiday club places reach the children and young people who need them most.