



Department
for Education

School-age Childcare Sufficiency (including Local Authority Capacity Funding 2026-27)

**Non statutory guidance for local
authorities**

March 2026

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Introduction and purpose

Purpose of this guidance

The Department for Education (DfE) is providing local authorities with £12.9 million of additional funding in the 2026 to 2027 financial year to support their capacity to deliver a sufficient and sustainable school-age childcare (SAC) system which is high quality, affordable, accessible and inclusive.

This guidance sets out DfE's expectations on how local authorities should use this funding to support the delivery and sustainability of SAC. This includes through supporting the national rollout of free breakfast clubs (FBCs) and fostering links between holiday childcare and the holiday activities and food (HAF) programme to maximise opportunities to deliver a sustainable SAC market.

This guidance also provides detail on supporting factors to ensure an effective local SAC offer which meets the needs of parents and children. Local authorities may therefore wish to reference this information when developing a strategic approach to SAC in their area.

Local authorities are required by section 6 of the [Childcare Act 2006](#) to ensure there are enough childcare places within their locality for working parents or for parents who are studying or training for employment, of children aged 0 to 14 (or up to 18 for disabled children). This guidance does not supersede the existing duty.

Who this guidance is for

This guidance is for all local authorities in England. Local authority School-Age Childcare Leads and other colleagues working on childcare-related activities such as early years childcare, the HAF Programme, FBC programme, or wraparound childcare must have due regard of this guidance when securing and delivering sufficient school-age childcare in their area, as per the local authority capacity grant funding conditions.

Schools and private, voluntary and independent (PVI) childcare providers, including childminders, may find this guidance useful to understand how their local authority can provide support for SAC, including wraparound and holiday childcare.

How to use this guidance

This guidance uses the word 'must' where the requirement is mandatory as set out in the draft [conditions of Local Authority Capacity Support Funding grant](#) or is a statutory requirement. Final grant conditions will be published in grant determination letters in April 2026.

Where the guidance uses the word 'should', local authorities are expected to take the guidance into account and are encouraged to follow it, unless there is a good reason not to.

DfE's vision for school-age childcare

The need for childcare does not stop when children reach school-age. We know many families continue to need childcare before and after school, and during the school holidays. In addition to wider investment in more accessible early education and childcare, we are taking a strategic approach to the future of SAC which builds on the successes of programmes such as the [National Wraparound Childcare programme](#), the [HAF programme](#) and the national rollout of the [FBC programme](#), to ensure families are supported, year round, by an outstanding SAC system.

Through investment in SAC, we want to support local authorities to deliver a sustainable, thriving childcare market that benefits children, parents, and communities. To achieve this, we expect local authorities to facilitate the delivery of sufficient childcare, in accordance with their existing duty, that responds to local need and is underpinned by strong local leadership and a well-coordinated system that promotes collaboration and efficiency. Local authorities should use their unique position to ensure local families are empowered and informed of their childcare choices and available financial support. Together, these actions will build a resilient system that meets local needs and supports long-term SAC sustainability.

Local Authority Capacity Support Funding (2026–27)

Purpose of the funding

The Local Authority Capacity Support Fund is designed to enhance local capacity to support, monitor and drive inclusive, high quality before-school, after-school and holiday childcare, which meets the needs of parents and carers, and children. Local authorities should:

- improve understanding of local SAC sufficiency including supply and demand; shape of the provider market; and barriers to and opportunities for the delivery of inclusive, high quality places
- work with parents, childcare providers, schools and other relevant organisations (e.g. Jobcentre Plus and Best Start Best Start Family Hubs), to drive demand, secure sufficient supply and connect parents to childcare offers and available financial support, including supporting the sustainability of existing childcare places
- support childcare providers and schools to deliver high quality, inclusive childcare that meets parents' needs and expectations
- maximise efficiency across SAC provision through driving a more strategic and efficient approach across programmes. For example, engaging with providers to map demand and using free programmes, like HAF and FBCs, as the building blocks to expand into wider wraparound and holiday childcare
- support the success of the national rollout of the FBC programme in schools, including both encouraging schools to join and successfully deliver the programme.

Local authorities should consider how other government programmes fit within their local childcare strategy to create a sustainable market. This fund is complementary to the HAF programme and other DfE initiatives. Local authorities are encouraged to align their SAC strategies with broader efforts to support families, reduce inequalities and improve educational outcomes including the approach set out in local authority Best Start local plans to improve child development and health outcomes by 2028 and beyond. This integrated approach will help families experience a coherent, end-to-end offer.

While the focus of the HAF programme remains on supporting disadvantaged children, DfE encourages SAC leads to work closely with HAF coordinators and data to improve SAC sufficiency over the holiday periods. For example, if a SAC lead becomes aware of a gap in holiday provision for families within a specific local area, they should engage their HAF team to explore the potential for expanding existing HAF provision in the area, including options for paid-for places, to support those families.

Use of funding

The Children, Families, and Youth Grant conditions specify that local authorities must have regard to this guidance. DfE expects local authorities to fulfil the responsibilities set out in this guidance.

Local authorities should use this funding for capacity costs, including set up costs, staffing, administration, and other internal costs associated with supporting the delivery of sufficient SAC. This may include contracting temporary external support to fulfil the conditions of grant. The funding should not be used to subsidise the cost of places for parents or be distributed to childcare providers.

Whilst we have provided a separate breakdown of the expected spend on HAF and local authority capacity, we expect local authorities to take a flexible approach to how they use both pots of funding to meet their individual resourcing needs and to drive a more strategic, joined up and efficient approach across programmes, so long as the funding is being used as appropriate to meet the funding conditions and expectations set out in the guidance.

Funding methodology

Local authority capacity funding is based on the proportion of school-age pupils attending schools in their areas and the overall budget. Additional weighting is applied for areas with higher levels of disadvantage and for local authorities with small populations. This methodology intends to strike a balance of factors which may result in varied SAC demand and sufficiency challenges, such as:

- deprivation levels
- supply of formal childcare
- the number of households with children
- the employment rates of households with children, by local authority.

Local authority allocations can be found [here](#).

Expectations for local authorities

Local authorities have a legal duty under section 6 of the Childcare Act 2006 to ensure there is sufficient childcare in their area for children aged 0–14 (and up to 18 for disabled children), to support parents who are working, studying or training for work. To support, monitor and drive inclusive high quality before school, after school and holiday childcare, which meets the needs of parents and carers and children, local authorities are expected to undertake the following as a minimum:

Assign a School-Age Childcare Lead

Local authorities must appoint a named SAC lead responsible for strategic oversight of the local SAC market and ensuring provision meets the needs of children and families. Authorities may create a new role or incorporate these responsibilities into existing posts, such as the HAF coordinator, and should allocate duties in the most effective and efficient way. SAC leads and HAF coordinators should collaborate where appropriate. Local authorities must also inform DfE of the nominated SAC lead and notify them of any changes.

Expected responsibilities for the SAC lead include:

- strategic leadership and compliance
- market planning and cross team co-ordination
- provider engagement and sustainability
- programme delivery
- parental engagement

Details of these responsibilities to which local authorities must have due regard are in Appendix 1.

Work collaboratively with schools and childcare providers

Local authorities should work closely with all SAC providers—schools, PVI and childminders—to maximise sufficiency, sustainability, and access to high quality, inclusive provision.

Schools

Schools are central to SAC, typically delivering wraparound childcare, FBCs and hosting HAF and paid holiday provision. We expect all schools with primary age pupils to have wraparound available on-site unless reasonable justification for not doing so. As many parents' first point of contact, they require regular and proactive engagement from local authorities.

Local authorities should:

- advise schools on key enablers such as marketing and use of space
- encourage schools to understand demand and expand or diversify where needed.
- support schools to consider and choose suitable delivery models (school-run, PVI-run, childminders, hubs/clusters) and understand Ofsted registration requirements
- ensure schools understand local childcare options so families receive clear information.

While the Department expects all schools, which educate primary aged pupils, to offer school or PVI-run SAC on site, we recognise that some schools may have a reasonable

justification for not doing so, such as a lack of suitable space. In these cases, local authorities should support schools to ensure parents are directed to appropriate provision, including off-site options, provided these do not require families to make additional drop offs or collections.

Private, voluntary, and independent providers

PVIs provide essential capacity, expertise, and flexibility across wraparound and holiday childcare. Local authorities should:

- engage PVIs to sustain and expand local childcare supply, including FBCs and HAF, including supporting PVIs to engage effectively with the wider system including schools, and matching PVIs to opportunities.
- use PVIs' insights into local demand and draw on their good practice (e.g., parent engagement, administration).
- support mixed models such as HAF programmes delivered alongside paid-for holiday childcare.
- work with PVIs that can deliver both termtime and holiday provision to strengthen sufficiency.

Childminders

Childminders are a vital part of the SAC system, offering flexible and family centred childcare—particularly for parents working atypical hours. While childminders mostly work on domestic premises, they can now spend more of their time on non-domestic premises. There is also a category called '[childminders without domestic premises](#)' which is for childminders who work solely from somewhere other than a home, such as a school, community or village hall.

Local authorities should:

- maintain a clear overview of childminders in their area
- help match childminders to suitable premises
- support childminders to identify local opportunities across schools and communities as well as make links to ensure sufficient signposting to provision.

Communication, guidance and business support

Local authorities should provide clear, accessible support to all SAC providers by:

- publishing contact information and available support for SAC, wraparound, FBC and HAF
- signposting guidance and best practice resources, including for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) provision
- advising providers on delivery models, registration requirements, and inclusive practice

- offering business and workforce support, including business planning, market entry, and encouraging Ofsted registration so parents can access financial support including Tax-Free Childcare (TFC) and Universal Credit
- helping schools and providers manage parental requests, broker partnerships, identify suitable space, and develop sustainable operating models
- supporting access to training to deliver high quality childcare.

Delivery models and registration

Local authorities should work with providers to identify which delivery model best meets local needs and ensures sustainability. Models may include:

- **school-led provision delivered by school staff on a school site:** Operated on school premises, managed by staff employed directly by the school, and open to all children in that school.
- **PVI led provision, on or off school site:** Delivered by staff employed by a private provider, operating either on a school site—where the provider may rent space—or from another suitable offsite location.
- **community/cluster model:** Coordinated by the local authority, with children from multiple schools attending provision on one site, operated by a lead school, private provider, community organisation or other suitable body.
- **childminders, on or off school site:** Delivered by Ofsted registered childminders or those registered with a childminder agency, working either individually from their homes or in groups of up to four on a single site, including domestic or nondomestic premises, and signposted by schools and local authorities.
- **early years providers:** Provision delivered by early years providers that can take school-aged children during wraparound hours, such as nurseries or preschools operating on or off school sites before and after the school day.

Local authorities should understand the Ofsted registration requirements and inspection arrangements for schools and childcare providers when planning SAC, including mixed-model approaches, and support providers to meet these obligations. Key guidance includes:

- [Registering and inspecting school-based provision](#)
- [Registering and inspecting school-based early years provision](#): latest updates
- information on registration exemptions, set out in [Registration exemptions](#)
- [Holiday activities and food: what you need to know](#).

The DfE will shortly be providing additional resources outlining the registration and inspection requirements for different SAC delivery models to support schools, providers, and local authorities.

Implement strong governance arrangements

Local authorities should ensure strong, effective governance arrangements are in place to oversee both the delivery and long-term development of SAC. Clear strategic leadership enables timely decision making and supports the coherent, sustainable expansion of high quality provision.

Senior leader engagement is essential. SAC is a crosscutting priority that contributes to children's outcomes, parental employment, local economic growth, and wider council aims. Visible senior sponsorship strengthens partnership working, empowers the SAC Lead, and ensures SAC is embedded within broader strategies for children, families, and communities.

SAC should sit within established strategic governance structures to maximise join up, utilise existing expertise, and avoid duplication. Locating SAC within a well-connected strategic area ensures the SAC Lead can work effectively with colleagues across education, early years, SEND, HAF, transport, Best Start Family Hubs, and youth services. This alignment provides clear oversight of sufficiency, sustainability, and the integration of termtime and holiday childcare.

Governance arrangements should be transparent, with clear roles, responsibilities, and lines of accountability. They should bring together key partners—including Directors of Children's Services, school and trust leaders, headteachers, parents, and sector representatives—to support shared priorities, consistent communication, and collaborative problem solving. Where suitable structures already exist, local authorities should make use of them to ensure efficient, coordinated oversight.

Provide information for parents and carers

Statutory duties

Section 12 of the [Childcare Act 2006](#) stipulates that local authorities must maintain a service providing information, advice and assistance to parents or prospective parents, which should cover the provision of childcare in their local area.

Raising awareness of available provision across term-time and holidays (including the HAF and FBC offers), and of available financial support and assistance, is essential for supporting parents to access SAC and securing long-term sustainability of provision.

Communicating the local offer

Local authorities should embed SAC information within existing Family Information Services and actively identify opportunities for driving demand, including raising awareness of SAC among parents. This includes promoting what provision is available—such as breakfast clubs, afterschool and holiday childcare (including unregistered provision if they have, or are able, to collect that

information) —alongside the type of provider, opening hours, costs, activities offered, and details of available financial support like TFC and Universal Credit. Local authorities should also make parents aware of their right to request SAC and support schools to handle requests transparently, while ensuring families can access tailored advice when needed, for example on transport.

To maximise awareness, local authorities should maintain clear, up to date information online and work with partners such as schools, HAF coordinators, early years leads, job centres, Best Start Family Hubs and other local organisations to promote SAC options. They should also support early years providers in helping families transition to SAC, host information sessions in schools or community venues, and use printed materials in public spaces to ensure families can easily access details about available childcare and the financial support that can help them use it.

Raising awareness of options and financial support

Local authorities should ensure that SAC provision is affordable to parents, as far as is reasonably practical. The cost of provision should be benchmarked against that of other childcare in the area. Provision should be both affordable to parents in a way that drives up and sustains demand but also supports providers to charge fees that maintain the financial viability of their businesses.

SAC Leads should promote the use of government support for the cost of SAC where possible. With TFC, the government will pay £2 for every £8 paid into an account, which can be used against payment for ‘approved’ childcare provision. Eligible parents can receive up to £2,000 per year per child until the September after they turn 11, or £4,000 per year for a child until the September after they turn 16 if the child is disabled.

Using the childcare element of Universal Credit, eligible parents may be able to [claim back up to 85% of their childcare costs](#). The amounts parents can receive in childcare costs are a maximum of £1,031.88 per month for one child, or a maximum of £1,768.94 per month for two or more children. It is important that parents are aware that there is additional support to help with the upfront cost of childcare. Parents might be able to get help with their upfront costs if they are starting work or increasing the hours they work, for example they’ve moved from part-time work to full-time work. Parents can apply for this additional support through their Universal Credit account or via their local jobcentre or work coach.

Local authorities should work with providers to ensure that parents can use TFC and Universal Credit. Information on how a provider can sign up to TFC can be found in [sign up to Tax-Free Childcare if you’re a childcare provider](#) guidance. Local authorities should ensure providers produce appropriate documentation (i.e. contracts, invoices, letters, receipts) to enable parents to evidence and reclaim childcare costs through Universal Credit. Guidance on Universal Credit childcare can be found in the [universal Credit childcare costs](#) guidance.

Local authorities should link where appropriate to government-owned websites providing more information about these government subsidies and what parents may be eligible. This could be through the [Best Start in Life website](#) or the [Childcare Calculator](#).

Support delivery of free breakfast clubs

Local authorities play a critical role in supporting DfE to deliver a smooth and effective national rollout of the FBC programme. As part of their strategic leadership of the local childcare system, local authorities should work with schools and stakeholders to support successful delivery of new FBCs and support sustainability of wider SAC provision.

Local authorities should:

- familiarise themselves with the FBC guidance for schools including DfE's support offer. [Free breakfast clubs: guidance for schools and trusts for phase 1 of the national rollout from April 2026](#) and the [FBCs Blueprint](#)
- provide a local support package that complements DfE assistance, tailored to school needs
- integrate FBC schools into wider provider support, including where relevant workforce training and sustainability support
- use existing communications channels to ensure parents, schools and partners can easily access information about FBCs and include FBCs within Family Information Service or equivalent web pages
- support takeup, especially for disadvantaged children, through wider parental engagement activity (e.g., Best Start Family Hubs)
- encourage early engagement with DfE preparation tools and surveys to identify schools needing additional support and build a clear picture of local readiness
- facilitate proactive planning with schools delivering FBCs in later phases—helping them understand registration and delivery requirements, anticipate capacity needs, and align FBCs with wider childcare and enrichment offers.

DfE will onboard schools and collect FBC data directly, including takeup. Local authorities will not be required to report FBC data, but a system for sharing this information with local authorities is in development.

Local authorities should support schools—individually and in groups—at each stage of rollout to ensure smooth, sustainable delivery.

Pre-registration phase

DfE is rolling out the FBC programme in cohorts to ensure schools can be supported as they commence the delivery of FBCs and that early learning can support future cohorts. Schools joining the programme in year 1 of national roll out, cohorts 1 and 2 have focused on disadvantage. Eligibility and selection for future

cohorts will be shared with local authorities once agreed to enable them to effectively support school engagement.

For each recruitment round local authorities should:

- share DfE promotional materials with eligible schools to increase their understanding of how they can sign up to the programme
- work with DfE, advisers and FBC champion schools to target schools who have not taken up the offer to encourage their participation.

Set up phase / before provision opens

Local authorities should:

- contact each school to identify any support needs
- support schools to plan integration of the FBC offer into current before-school or wraparound provision, or the opportunity to build on FBC to offer wider provision
- facilitate partnerships between schools, trusts and PVI childcare providers where appropriate to support effective delivery of FBCs
- signpost schools to [DfE support offer](#) including guidance materials, advisers and FBC champion schools to ensure schools are engaging effectively with support
- support schools to understand Ofsted registration requirements and inspection arrangements, to help inform decision making regarding the use of different FBC delivery models.

Early delivery / first year

Local authorities should:

- direct schools to the [DfE support offer](#), including advisers and school champions
- engage with schools to drive pupil take up of FBCs, considering the needs of working parents, and how to encourage sustained take-up among children who are vulnerable to food poverty and hunger, or those who need extra support in areas such as attendance, behaviour, or wellbeing
- encourage peer-to-peer support between schools to share learning and best practice, including from schools already successfully delivering
- provide local support to schools as required to complement the DfE offer, this may include:
 - supporting schools to consider different options to enable children to attend FBCs where transport is currently a barrier
 - guidance and support on safeguarding, food procurement, and waste disposal
 - practical support for implementation (including supporting with workforce and space considerations)
- escalate concerns about school delivery to DfE as required

Sustained delivery (schools that have moved away from direct DfE support - 12 months on)

Schools in this phase of delivery will move away from direct DfE support towards a peer to peer system led approach. Local authorities are well placed to help facilitate this and should:

- maintain regular (at least termly) contact with all FBC schools to identify any support needs
- maintain peer-to peer support between schools to share learning and best practice, facilitating a system led approach to continuous improvement
- continue to support schools to drive pupil take up of FBCs
- raise risks as they become aware of them to either individual school or local authority delivery as appropriate.

In all phases of delivery local authorities should communicate and promote DfE's messaging on the FBC programme to ensure that information about FBCs in their area is accessible to parents and carers, schools, and across the wider local authority. Information should be incorporated into existing communications on early years and SAC on their family information service or equivalent local authority website. This should include a list of schools actively enrolled on the [FBCs programme](#). DfE will inform local authorities of participating schools in their area once they have been confirmed.

Data, evidence, and reporting requirements

As per the Children, Families and Youth Grant [conditions](#), local authorities must provide data and evidence relating to the sufficiency and sustainability of SAC to DfE.

Local authorities should:

- provide DfE with their annual sufficiency duty report once it has been completed and made available to parents.

Local authorities must:

- complete a sufficiency proforma, based on their annual report and relevant provider engagement
- complete SAC capacity surveys when requested, based on their understanding of the local market, barriers, and actions taken to support families and providers
- complete ongoing wraparound monitoring returns, engaging with providers funded through the national wraparound childcare programme as necessary.

The reporting will allow DfE to monitor local authority compliance with grant conditions and expectations while standardising data included in sufficiency duty reports to support local and national understanding of the childcare system and its challenges, as well as the sustainability of places delivered through the national wraparound programme. The timetable for these reporting mechanisms is set out in the table below.

Local authorities are encouraged to align their SAC sufficiency data collection and monitoring with existing reporting for different childcare programmes, such as early years entitlements and HAF. Local authorities should consider how data can be brought together across teams, to provide a more holistic understanding of the local childcare market and may wish to consider using integrated dashboards to support strategic insights and actions.

To support local authorities to collect information for these returns we have provided some key definitions and descriptions in the [glossary](#) at the end of this document.

| Monitoring return | Provisional timetable |
|---------------------------------|---|
| SAC capacity survey 1 | May 2026 (summer term 25/26) |
| Wraparound monitoring 1 | June 2026 (summer term 25/26) |
| SAC capacity survey 2 | September 2026 (autumn term 26/27) |
| Wraparound monitoring 2 | January 2026 (spring term 26/27) |
| SAC capacity survey 3 | January 2026 (spring term 26/27) |
| Sufficiency proforma | March (spring term 26/27) |
| Annual sufficiency duty reports | Local authorities should submit this to DfE at the point it is made available and accessible to parents |

Annual childcare sufficiency duty report

The statutory guidance on [Early Education and Childcare](#) sets the expectation that local authorities should report annually to elected council members on how they are meeting their duty to secure sufficient childcare, including for school-aged children. This report should be made available and accessible to parents.

DfE expects local authorities to base their reports on a proportionate level of data relating to supply and demand in their local area, to ensure there is adequate detail and evidence to support their assessment of SAC sufficiency, alongside their assessment of early years sufficiency, within their report.

We know there are varying approaches and quality of school-age elements of sufficiency reports. To support the consistency and quality of these reports we have compiled a list of the school-age elements we expect local authorities to consider when conducting their annual engagement with providers and completing their reports (see Appendix 2). The reports should include a summary of the local authority's assessment of whether there is sufficient childcare for school-aged children as well as, critically, how and why they have come to this conclusion. Information collected as part of the reports should be used to inform future planning and an action plan on areas for improvement.

Local authorities may wish to use additional resources beyond those made available by DfE when completing their reports, such as those produced by childcare organisations and charities.

DfE is requesting that local authorities provide us with their childcare sufficiency duty reports. Local authorities have autonomy over when in 2026-27 they complete their annual report and should therefore submit it to the Department when it is made available to parents.

SAC sufficiency proforma

DfE will require local authorities to provide the headline data used to complete the SAC elements of their sufficiency duty report through a sufficiency proforma. While local authorities have some discretion over the content of their report (as per the statutory guidance), the proforma will provide a standardised return which DfE will use to improve overall understanding of the SAC landscape - including sufficiency issues and evidence gaps, improving the quality and consistency of local authority reporting across term-time and holidays.

Local authorities will continue to have autonomy over what point in the year they complete their report. To give local authorities the most time and flexibility possible, DfE will commission the sufficiency proforma in January 2027 with a return deadline in March 2027. To support local authority planning, a proforma template will be shared in summer term 2026. Local authorities who engage providers before the template is made available should work on the basis that the proforma will closely align with the below data categories.

Local authorities will be expected to summarise the data collected for their annual sufficiency duty report to local authority level for the following:

SAC availability

- The number of registered childcare providers, by provider type (schools, PVI, childminders) in their local area providing:
 - before-school childcare
 - after-school childcare
 - holiday childcare
 - number of known closures (informed by Ofsted registration, Family Information Services, or provider engagement).
- The number of places available through registered providers, by provider type:
 - before-school
 - after-school
 - during holidays
 - unregistered holiday provision where feasible, but as a minimum that which is identified through the HAF programme and that is meeting the relevant

exemption criteria. Information regarding this can be found in the [Holiday activities and food: what you need to know guidance](#)

- net change, including as a result of closures.

SAC demand:

- An estimate of the need for places:
 - before-school
 - after-school
 - during holidays
 - estimate need for children with SEND
 - the methodology used to estimate demand.

SAC costs:

- The average hourly childcare cost to families by provider type:
 - before-school
 - after-school
 - during holidays

Local authorities are only required to provide information relating to registered childcare providers in their area across term-times and holidays in their sufficiency proforma return. Local authorities may hold information relating to unregistered provision, including provision exempt from registration with Ofsted, which they will have the option to include. We know unregistered provision is more commonly used during the holidays, and so SAC leads should work alongside their HAF coordinators to identify unregistered holiday provision through the HAF programme.

As local authorities will need to engage with schools and providers to complete their reports, we will also request information around provider response rates to local surveys and engagement. DfE will only use data on provider response rates to assess the robustness of the data returns.

DfE will support local authorities to complete the sufficiency proforma and other monitoring returns as part of the wider support offer and through the development of new tools and resources.

SAC capacity surveys

The surveys will monitor local authority activity related to the grant, gather intelligence related to challenges and progress, help local authorities identify areas of focus, and inform DfE's support offer. The surveys will require SAC leads to use their local knowledge and understanding of the childcare system and are qualitative in nature. As such, they should not require additional engagement with providers and families beyond what the local authority is already doing to complete other monitoring returns.

The surveys will require local authorities to provide information on:

- use of the local authority capacity support funding
- progress and confidence in data collection and reporting of SAC sufficiency, including assessing supply and demand
- actions taken and planned to support schools and providers across term-time and holidays, including but not limited to schools delivering the FBCs programme and holiday providers; this includes actions taken to build supply, take up, and sustainability of places (including places created through the wraparound programme).
- actions taken and planned to support children and families access the childcare they need during term-time and holidays
- barriers to accessing and delivering sufficient SAC during term-times and holidays which will help to inform DfE's support offer.

DfE will require local authorities to provide information on the actions they are taking to support schools delivering the FBCs programme, those joining the programme in April and September 2026, and how they are promoting the programme through their regular engagement with schools. However, DfE will remain responsible for data collection for the programme and local authorities are not required to undertake additional data collection in relation to FBCs to complete these returns in financial year 2026-27. DfE will continue to explore how it can best work with local authorities on the FBCs programme, including any information or support to help them meet expectations.

Ongoing wraparound childcare monitoring

Local authorities must monitor and support the sustainability of additional full and partial wraparound childcare places delivered through the National Wraparound Childcare Programme, in accordance with the grant conditions.

Local authorities must participate in two wraparound data collections in financial year 2026-27. The first return in June 2026 will allow DfE to monitor the wraparound places created since the end of the programme or any places that might have been missed from the February monitoring information (MI) return. A second return in January 2027 will allow DfE to monitor the sustainability of the places delivered through the National Wraparound Childcare Programme near the end of the financial year.

Local authorities will be required to complete a version of the MI return on behalf of their providers. The return will contain the latest figures held for each provider and local authorities will be expected to update the following information before returning it to DfE:

- wraparound status and number of funded places
- confidence level that current places will be sustained over the next 6 months

Local authorities should continue to work closely with providers funded through the National Wraparound Childcare Programme. The ongoing monitoring should be used to identify provision at risk or closure or reduction of hours or capacity and

proactively offer support to providers to improve sustainability of provision. This could include:

- business modelling and management
- quality of childcare provision
- marketing and promotion
- gathering and sharing best practice.

Assurance and grant compliance

Recipients must maintain reliable, accessible and up to date accounting records with an audit trail for all funding expenditure. DfE will require evidence of how the funding has been used. This will be incorporated into the HAF statement of expenditure (or statement of usage) which should be completed by the local authority after the end of the 2026 to 2027 financial year and be submitted to DfE by 1 May 2027. Local authorities will be given a template and guidance for this document before the end of the reporting period.

Any unspent funding identified by DfE in these reports may be subject to recovery and must be repaid by the local authority if requested.

Support available for local authorities

DfE is making a range of support available, which we expect local authorities to engage with as appropriate. This will include:

- providing access to practical resources for local authorities to use independently
- national webinars and briefings
- facilitating peer networks to support collaboration and share best practice
- facilitating individual support to those local authorities who require additional help

This offer is intended to complement existing DfE support, including on FBCs and HAF.

Self-help support

There are a range of resources available for local authorities to use independently, which can be found on the [Knowledge Hub](#). These resources can support Local Authorities with different aspects of sufficiency planning, including tools and information to support with:

- improving understanding of local sufficiency through supply and demand mapping and market engagement
- market sustainability, including marketing and promotion and recruitment and retention
- delivering high quality places and promoting inclusive practice.

Local authorities are expected to refer to these resources in the first instance before exploring other avenues for support. Local authorities are also encouraged to use Knowledge Hub to connect and share best practice with other local authorities.

Peer networks

DfE will facilitate regional local authority peer-to-peer events at key points throughout the year, to support local authorities to work collaboratively, share learning and good practice and continue to build strong peer connections. The content for these sessions will be informed by insights gathered through the National Wraparound Childcare Programme and local authority intelligence, including surveys, ensuring that each event is tailored to address emerging needs and provide the most valuable support.

Individual support

DfE will facilitate individual support for local authorities who are facing significant challenges, including by brokering connections with other local authorities, or small groups of local authorities, who can help them with developing strategies for overcoming barriers.

Local authorities who have questions or requests for DfE, should contact us via School-Age.CHILDCARE@education.gov.uk.

Quality, safety and inclusion

Ensuring children experience safe, high quality and inclusive childcare is central to the role of local authorities. While securing sufficient and sustainable provision is essential, it is equally important that before and afterschool and holiday childcare offers enriching, engaging experiences that children enjoy and families trust.

Local authorities play a key role in promoting these expectations across the sector—supporting providers to embed strong practice, championing inclusive approaches, and responding effectively where concerns arise. By working closely with schools and childcare providers, local authorities help create environments where all children can learn, thrive and feel safe. Key components include:

Ofsted registration requirements

Local authorities should support schools and childcare providers to understand their individual registration requirements. Whilst it is the responsibility of each provider to determine whether they are legally required to register with Ofsted, local authorities should encourage registration wherever possible, including in cases where registration is not mandatory.

Registration is important not only for safeguarding, but because it unlocks benefits to families, such as eligibility for TFC or the childcare element of Universal Credit. This can allow families to [claim back up to 85% of childcare costs](#) when using Ofsted registered settings.

Local authorities should familiarise themselves with Ofsted registration criteria and inspection arrangements across different delivery models, including where exemptions apply:

- **for schools:** some school-operated SAC may be exempt from registration if specific [exemption criteria](#) are met. Local authorities should understand these exemptions and be able to support schools to identify whether their provision falls within them
- **for PVI providers and childminders:** most PVI providers will need to register with Ofsted, depending on the type of care offered and the age range served. Some providers may choose voluntary registration, while others may be exempt. Local authorities should support providers to understand the appropriate route and encourage registration to ensure minimum safeguarding standards are met.

In some cases, there are also department grant conditions in place for funded programmes that require providers to be registered. For example, the FBC programme requires PVI providers delivering FBCs to be registered with Ofsted.

Further information on registration and exemptions is available in Ofsted's guidance on [Registering and inspecting schoolbased provision](#).

To support Local Authorities in working with potential providers, Ofsted have also developed the following resources:

- [Become a childminder: pre-registration briefing](#)
- [Become a childcare provider: pre-registration briefing](#)
- [Ofsted: early years – News and updates on early years inspection](#)

Safeguarding responsibilities

Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children is everyone's responsibility. We want all SAC settings to be a safe and happy place for children, and for parents, carers, and families to feel confident that their child is well looked after and robust safeguarding arrangements are in place.

We encourage all local authorities to work closely with their local safeguarding children partnership to:

- make them aware of existing provision and what it can offer
- ensure that they can support settings to put safeguarding arrangements in place.

Local authorities should ensure that their local safeguarding partners understand local SAC provision and those working on the delivery of it are familiar with:

- the [Working together to Safeguard Children](#) guidance;
- [keeping Children Safe in Education](#) guidance, which all schools and colleges in England must have regard to;
- the statutory requirements set out in section 3 of the [statutory requirements for the early years foundation stage](#).
- the statutory requirements of the General Childcare register (voluntary and compulsory parts).

Local authorities should be aware that safeguarding expectations differ depending on a range of factors, including but not limited to:

- who delivers the provision (school-run vs external provider) and under what model:
 - where SAC is delivered by school staff under school management the school's existing child protection arrangements apply
 - when schools hire out space to external organisations they should ensure providers have suitable safeguarding policies and clear arrangements for liaison with the school on safeguarding matters

- safeguarding expectations must be reflected in hire or lease agreements, with consequences for noncompliance
- registration status of the provider:
 - all SAC providers must ensure appropriate suitability checks (e.g., enhanced DBS with barred list) for anyone working with children but the specific requirements differ depending on registration status and delivery model
- registered providers must prevent unsupervised contact between children and any adult without the required DBS checks
- volunteers with regular, unsupervised access to children are in regulated activity and therefore require enhanced DBS checks.

Local authorities should familiarise themselves with the safeguarding requirements of the early years register and the general childcare register (compulsory and voluntary parts) and be prepared to help schools and childcare providers to understand those requirements. We expect local authorities to demonstrate that those involved in the delivery of SAC provision in their area are competent and have received adequate training and support.

Inclusivity and SEND

SAC must be accessible to all children, including those with complex needs and those attending specialist settings. Providers are required to make reasonable adjustments under the Equality Act 2010, and the Equality and Human Rights Commission makes clear that where an adjustment is needed for a disabled child to attend, the provider—not the parent—must cover the cost. When considering whether an adjustment is reasonable, providers should think about its necessity for equal access, its practicality, and the affordability of any one off or ongoing costs. If an adjustment is judged unreasonable yet essential for a child to attend, providers may ask parents to contribute but must ensure any charges comply fully with the Equality Act.

FBC provision delivered under DfE arrangements must always remain free to parents. Local authorities must also publish a SEND Local Offer, bringing together information on local services and support; the wraparound childcare offer should be included within this to ensure families can easily access relevant information.

Specialist settings and alternative provision

We expect local authorities to factor all schools into their SAC strategy, although we understand that traditional school-based wraparound models may not be feasible outside of mainstream settings, given the additional staffing requirements and the potential impact on cost for parents. Where demand is identified for pupils attending non-mainstream schools, local authorities should work with schools to establish appropriate provision where possible.

Schools should communicate the local available offer to parents of the children that attend their school to ensure equal opportunities for all children.

Links to wider government programmes

Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)

Engagement with local job centres is crucial as we know that the lack of sufficient SAC care can limit job opportunities for families. Local authorities should make sure that local job centres are aware of where to find the latest information in relation to available childcare within their locality to enable them to signpost parents who cite childcare as a potential barrier for returning to work to the most up to date information. This includes to government childcare offers such as TFC and Universal Credit childcare (including support with upfront childcare costs where eligible).

We expect local authorities to work with job centres in their area on an ongoing basis to understand the potential for future unmet demand as uptake of the new provision increases.

Best Start Family Hubs and Start for Life

Best Start Family Hubs are a place-based way of joining up locally in the planning and delivery of a range of family services. They are 'one stop shops' that make it easier for families to get the support they need. The hub approach means professionals and partners working together more effectively, with a focus on supporting and strengthening the family relationships that carry us all through life.

Where local authorities have established Best Start Family Hubs, they may want to explore using Best Start Family Hubs to signpost families to the available SAC provision in their areas, in line with the programme's aims for services to become more accessible and better connected.

More information on Best Start Family Hubs and Start for Life can be found on [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk).

Ministry of Defence: The National Wraparound (WAC) Childcare Scheme

The Wraparound Childcare (WAC) scheme was created by the Ministry of Defence to help to remove some of the barriers that Service families face around childcare. Funding for WAC is designed to help working families with the cost of childcare and to allow partners to get back into work (or work more hours). WAC funding can support eligible Service families with children aged 4 to 11 years old (16 years old if in receipt of certain disability allowances), who are attending school or being home educated in the UK. If eligible, Personnel can claim up to 20 hours per week of funding for each child that is attending before and after school care during term time.

There is more information on the WAC Childcare Scheme available on the [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk) website.

Glossary

School-age childcare

For the purposes of this guidance, SAC refers to paid-for and free childcare provision for children from reception onwards, delivered outside of normal school hours, such as:

- before and after school
- during school holidays
- on inset days

SAC includes childcare provided by schools, PVI and childminders, both on and off the school premises. SAC includes programmes that may not have childcare as their primary focus but provide care for children outside of the school day. This includes government programmes such as the FBC and HAF programmes.

Some childcare providers may extend their offer to nursery-age children. SAC is distinct from pre-reception age [Early Years childcare](#), including school-based nurseries.

Wraparound childcare

Wraparound childcare is childcare that is provided around the conventional school day. This should be provision that is run regularly by the school or provider and is distinct from other activities such as sports clubs. FBCs, which provide thirty minutes of free childcare at participating schools, is also considered wraparound childcare and should be accounted for when local authorities are engaging providers and reporting on term-time childcare supply and demand.

Holiday childcare

Holiday childcare is childcare that is provided during the school holidays, typically across Christmas, Easter, and Summer and half-terms, but also includes school inset days. Holiday childcare can be provided by schools, PVI, including childminders, and holiday clubs. Holiday childcare may provide a full day (8am-6pm) or partial childcare hours. The HAF programme contributes to holiday childcare by providing support for children and families from low-income backgrounds during the school holiday periods.

Free breakfast clubs

The government is committed to delivering on its pledge to provide a FBC in every state-funded school with primary-aged children. The FBCs programme will support the government's aims of giving every pupil regardless of their background [the best start in life](#), breaking down barriers to every child [achieving and thriving](#) at school and in later life,

by ensuring they are ready to learn, as well as supporting families with cost of living, and tackling poverty.

HAF

The [Holiday Activities and Food \(HAF\) programme](#) funds local authorities to deliver free holiday provision for children in receipt of benefits related free school meals. HAF provides access to enriching activities, healthy meals, and a safe environment during the main school holidays. Local authorities may also use up to 15% of their funding to support other children who would benefit. Although HAF's primary focus is enrichment and food, it functions as part of the broader SAC offer by giving families access to structured holiday childcare.

Sports and activity clubs

Schools may offer specific after-school activities such as sports and activity clubs. Typically, these activities are not regularly accessible throughout the week for families and children and so are not considered to be wraparound childcare. As a result, local authorities are not expected to include these within their monitoring returns.

SAC age range

Monitoring returns for SAC, as set out in the data section, will focus on improving the quality and consistency of SAC monitoring for primary-age children (4-11 years). We will include options for local authorities to provide additional information on secondary SAC where they have the data and capability to do so.

Registered and unregistered childcare providers

Registered provision refers to schools and providers who are Ofsted registered, and childminders who are registered with an agency and listed on the early years and general childcare register. Providers who offer childcare services, but are not on either of these registers, are classified as unregistered provision (unless they are legally exempt from registration). Certain providers and holiday clubs may need to legally register with Ofsted depending on the provision they offer and the age range of children that they care for.

Appendices

Appendix 1: SAC leads role and responsibilities

Local authorities's SAC leads are expected to undertake the following responsibilities in relation to school-age childcare. These actions do not supersede the statutory duty for local authorities to provide sufficiency childcare for parents in their area, but should support local authorities to meet that duty.

1. Strategic leadership and compliance

- Act as the lead officer for SAC, responsible for strategic oversight of the SAC
- Serve as the primary DfE point of contact for SAC sufficiency, reporting and grant assurance
- Lead the development, coordination and implementation of the local SAC strategy, ensuring alignment with statutory duties, grant conditions and related programmes (FBC, HAF)
- Ensuring compliance with relevant policies, including checking providers are Ofsted registered where necessary, providing advice, and promoting voluntary registration to private providers
- Fulfil all grant reporting, assurance requirements and data returns
- Provide clear briefings and advice to senior leadership to support evidence-based decision making

2. Market planning and cross team coordination

- Work collaboratively with early years, HAF, pupil place planning, admissions, transport and SEND teams to produce a comprehensive understanding of local supply and demand
- Lead market analysis to identify gaps, challenges and opportunities, ensuring a coordinated and joined up local childcare offer
- Support strategic alignment with wider local authority plans (e.g., family hubs, employment support, local growth)

3. Provider engagement and sustainability

- Engage with schools, trusts, PVIs, childminders and community organisations to support sustainable delivery of before-school, afterschool and holiday provision
- Support and monitor provision established through the national wraparound programme, identifying risks early and brokering support to sustain viability
- Provide or coordinate local authority business support to providers including workforce planning, clear guidance on Ofsted registration, space planning, quality improvement, business modelling

4. Programme delivery and integration

- Support schools to implement and sustain the FBC programme, including engagement, troubleshooting and communication of DfE guidance
- Work with HAF coordinators (if applicable) and other programme leads to integrate free and paid for provision, ensuring a holistic, efficient system
- Coordinate local peer learning, best practice networks, and integration of national toolkits

5. Parental engagement and information

- Ensure parents and carers have access to clear, accurate and up to date information about SAC provision, costs, and available financial support (TFC, UC)
- Work with schools, childcare providers and Family Information Services to improve parental awareness and drive demand

6. Data, evidence and sufficiency assessment

- Lead the local authority's annual Sufficiency Duty Report for schoolage childcare, ensuring robust and high quality analysis
- Complete SAC sufficiency proformas and any required DfE data collections
- Maintain monitoring systems on provider sustainability, occupancy, SEND access and local demand indicators

7. Partnership and governance

- Contribute to strong SAC governance structures, ensuring cross directorate and multi agency collaboration
- Engage senior managers proactively, providing reporting and insights that support strategic oversight and accountability
- Build constructive partnerships with schools, trusts, PVI's, childminders, safeguarding partners, job centres and family hubs

8. Quality, safeguarding and inclusion

- Promote high quality, inclusive provision that meets DfE expectations on safeguarding, quality standards, SEND accessibility, food standards and safe environments, and working with relevant sector bodies to ensure compliance, e.g. liaising with environmental health teams
- Support providers to meet regulatory requirements and maintain compliance with Ofsted requirements and KCSIE
- Advocate for accessible, inclusive childcare and support providers in making reasonable adjustments in line with the Equality Act

Appendix 2: SAC content for annual Sufficiency Duty Reports

1. Executive summary

Local authorities should include:

- an overview of findings and progress against previous year's action plan, including clear confirmation of whether there is sufficient SAC for families who need it
- a summary of any gaps in SAC and what is driving them, local barriers, and an action plan for the upcoming year.

Additional information can include:

- the local authority's ambition and local vision for SAC in their area
- local authority specific information impacting SAC, for example geography, rurality, demographics.

2. Demand for childcare

Local authorities should include:

- demand during term time, broken down by age, provider type, and time (before- or after-school childcare, part- or full-wraparound childcare)
- demand for holiday periods, broken down by age, provider type, and time
- demand for childcare for children with SEND
- number of children on waiting lists and number of right to request the local authority has been made aware of by schools, providers, or parents
- factors impacting local demand and demographics, including what has driven changes from previous years, such as deprivation, migration, and housing developments (SAC leads should draw on expertise from estates, pupil place planning and early years colleagues) and what actions the local authority is taking to drive demand such as communication strategies to raise awareness, including in relation to TFC and UC Childcare.

Additional information can include:

- demand by local authority geography, for example by ward or borough
- demand for atypical hours, outside of the usual 8am to 6pm framework
- family surveys and views on childcare availability.

3. Supply of childcare

Local authorities should include:

- supply during term-time, broken down by age, provider type, and time (before- or after schools, part- or full-wraparound childcare)
- supply data for children with SEND
- supply for holiday periods, broken down by age, provider type, time (for holiday periods, SAC Leads should work in collaboration with the local HAF coordinator so that relevant details from the HAF annual report are reflected in the sufficiency assessments)
- factors impacting local supply and sustainability and what actions the local authority is taking to address these, such as creating or expanding provision.

Additional information can include:

- supply by local authority geography, for example providers broken down by ward or borough
- providers offering atypical hours, outside the usual 8am to 6pm framework
- provider views on business sustainability and challenges
- occupancy rates and vacancies.

4. Affordability and costs

Local authorities should include:

- average childcare costs across different provider types, and how these have changed
- an assessment of the extent to which affordability has prevented families from accessing childcare.

Additional information can include:

- evidence of local authority promotion of TFC or UC childcare and family uptake of these subsidies
- cost change to parents over time
- cost mapping across the local authority (by ward or borough)
- family perceptions of value for money of SAC provision.

5. Quality of provision

Local authorities should include:

- Ofsted ratings for relevant providers and local quality assessment and improvement initiatives.

Additional information can include:

- the local authority's confidence in standards being met, for example food standards, and how they have supported schools and providers to meet standards
- the key reasons for quality not being met and actions taken to address them

- the changes in Ofsted ratings over time
- family perceptions of quality of SAC provision.

6. Access and inclusion

Local authorities should include:

- an assessment of the sufficiency of provision for children with additional needs (for example English as an additional language) and SEND
- any targeted initiatives for areas of high deprivation
- barriers for children with additional needs and SEND accessing SAC and local authority actions and plans to address these barriers.

Additional information can include:

- an assessment of the sufficiency of childcare for children with SEND over time
- support for vulnerable groups (for example looked-after and previously looked-after children).

7. Workforce and sustainability

Local authorities should include:

- assessment of workforce suitability and sustainability, for example development needs and opportunities for upskilling, in relation to SAC
- staffing challenges and recruitment strategies.

Additional information can include:

- impact of funding and policy changes, for example impact of teacher and support staff pay awards.

8. Methodology

Local authorities should include:

- data sources and approach used for the assessment and report
- where data is published, local authorities should provide links and where data is not published, they should include key details, for example the number of schools or providers who responded to surveys.

Additional information can include:

- the local authority's assessment of the data used in the annual report, including quality, granularity, and overall confidence.



Department
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