

Out with the old

There are an abundance of reasons for schools wanting to freshen up their establishments – we discuss a few of these reasons with those in the know

Schools all over the country dream of being able to provide their pupils with a dining environment of the highest standard. I'm not talking about pristine place settings, crystal glasses and a china side plate placed to the left – that would just be daft. I'm talking about creating a place where pupils eat that itself creates an atmosphere. A place where diners want to go and naturally flock to every time that lunch bell rings. Easier said than done though, isn't it?

The Institute of Fiscal Studies recently announced that public spending on education is falling at the fastest rate since the 1950s. It is also believed that spending on school buildings is one of three areas within the sector that look set to be most affected. Iain Munro, chairman of CEDA, comments: "Within the education sector, there is intense pressure to control costs and meet Government's sustainability targets. Around 15% of public sector carbon emissions come from activities in the English school system and about one third of this is from energy use in school buildings." »

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In an increasingly environmentally aware society, the Government has emphasised its commitment to sustainable development and the importance of preparing young people for the future. Their approach to sustainable reform in the education sector is based on the belief that schools perform better when they take responsibility for their own improvement. "We believe schools are entitled to make their own judgements on how they approach sustainability," adds Munro. "CEDA has made it their priority to be here to help advise on the best value, energy efficient purchases and to accommodate an operator's wish to refurbish with these new requirements in mind."

Like any major change in life, whether it's a new car for the family or a huge overall of catering facilities in a school, it can never hurt to seek advice from the people who

dedicate their lives to the area in question.

"Planning is crucial for any school thinking of refurbishing their existing kitchen facilities," believes Lee Vines, marketing manager of PKL. "Things like timescales, making sure you can still operate if you're planning on doing something during term time, and working with a partner you can rely on are all very important. If you're looking to do something different then work with a partner who will understand your needs and offer creative solutions."

Talk to the industry and evaluate your options. What have you got to lose? Catering managers and those who control the refurbishment/refit budget would do well to discuss their plans with as many experts as possible; get a feel of what you need and what the market has to offer.

"Before purchasing new equipment or planning an entire refit, it is extremely

important you choose your supplier partner carefully," states Glen Crossland, marketing manager of Dawson Foodservice Equipment. "Is the product green? By choosing an environmentally focused supplier your energy bills can be significantly reduced. Don't just buy for today; think for tomorrow and the future of your kitchen environment."

"Product durability is extremely important – when purchasing products you need to be sure they are going to stand the test of time. Case studies and site references are a great insight into real life examples of equipment. Ask your supplier partner for these and see the equipment before you purchase. Sales support and customer service are big factors to consider, be sure you choose a company that prides themselves on after-sales support. This is equally as important as the products in your kitchen."

Hold on a second, perhaps we're getting

a little ahead of ourselves. It's all well and good getting the best product support, planning advice and warranties money can buy, but I do believe we're missing a couple of key considerations.

"Creating a sociable environment for children where they can sit and talk freely with each other and their teachers, in a space that is both engaging and comfortable, has to be another key consideration," says Phil Howard, managing director of Catering Design Group.

"Whenever possible, we like to involve the children - after all, they are the customer! Involving the children in the refurbishment programme helps to get their buy-in and for them to take ownership of the space. The knock-on effect of this is that they enjoy being in the restaurant, which ultimately works to increase school meal uptake."

Let's not forget who the refurbishment/refit is actually for. The pupils and staff in the school are quite possibly the number one priority for needs analysis. Is there anything else caterers should consider?

"The number of pupils and staff, the times of meals and how long pupils/staff have for lunch, etc.," says Peter Walker, who does marketing for Garners Foodservice Equipment. "The type of catering provision ('grab-n-go' to sit down meals) is really important, as is the flow of the facilities to prevent long queues. Also what equipment can be reconditioned, what has to be replaced, various degrees of legislation, the list is endless!"

Once this endless list has been considered (no, we can't cover every point, as there would be no room left to talk about the end results!) school caterers should think ahead to the benefits which should theoretically rain upon them and their establishments. After all, a refurbishment/refit should be put into process to eventually increase overall uptake.

"It may well be that the existing layout is completely at odds with what would work best now - perhaps the way the kitchen operates now is much different to how it did when it was first installed, and so a redesign might make a big difference," comments Kurran Gadhvi, marketing manager of Valera. "And remember, you don't necessarily have to throw away the old

FCSI consultant Andrew Etherington's top tips for schools looking to revamp their catering facilities:

- Ambience and environment - get this right to encourage school meal uptake
- Suitability of equipment and furniture - before signing on the dotted line, be sure that the products are right for you
- Durability - look into products and solutions that will last to get the most value from your investment
- Big improvements can be made with small budgets - think about quick and easy updates to make a big impression on the overall look and feel
- Engage your students - get everyone involved and make the improvements that really matter to those who use the facilities.

equipment. If it's in good working order then it can be moved and re-positioned, which also presents you with an opportunity to have the equipment serviced and thoroughly cleaned."

Keeping old equipment that shows no threat of failing anytime soon can also act as a major cost-saver during a time of dramatic spending - we'd all like to save a few pounds here and there. Also, whilst considering a more extreme overhaul of facilities that sees buildings being ripped apart, you never know what extra hidden costs may sit behind the next demolished wall.

"Always bear in mind that there may be unexpected cost implications to bring an area up to date in line with current regulations and legislations," states David Summers, managing director of ABDA Creative Design & Build. "For example, asbestos. If your building was built prior to 2000 you are required to have an asbestos report. If you are planning any building work, no matter how minor it may seem, check your asbestos report at the earliest opportunity (the design and build company you are thinking of using will request to see this before quoting any work).

"Safe asbestos removal must be done by a registered company and disposed of in the correct manner. It can be expensive, but do not cut corners to save money - it will only cost you in the end. If you do not have an asbestos report and your building pre-dates 2000, you will need to have one done prior

to any work being carried out."

Every school or catering manager will have their own reasons for wanting a beneficial overhaul of their areas and equipment. Indeed, with every reason comes a vision of what the finished space will look like. To all catering teams, I say keep hold of that vision. There will be possibilities of hiccups and forks in the road that you'll just have to deal with when you get there - persevere for all the good you see coming from the project and it'll hopefully all be worth it.

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