

# Serving up a great deal and healthier dinners

Time-poor head teachers and bursars are entrusting tasks such as school catering and cleaning to specialist consultancies, so teaching staff can focus on pupils

**T**urning a somewhat lacklustre, loss-making catering concern into a profitable school meals initiative has been a feather in the financial cap at mixed comprehensive Oaks Park High School in Redbridge, Essex. Pupils at Oaks Park can now enjoy a quality school lunch, offering a variety of meat dishes, vegetarian options, a salad bar, and healthy snacking options on a daily basis. Such is its success that over half the school's 1,600 pupils have opted in.

Just as impressive as the food on the menu is the news that the school is now making a healthy profit from its catering provision.

What changed for Oaks Park was that in 2009 it turned to Educo, an independently run catering and facilities management consultancy working exclusively for the UK state and private education sector providing a comprehensive range of services to help head teachers, governors and bursars monitor and improve provision.

School meal catering is often by far the biggest contract a school or college has to tender. Some larger institutions may have a contract with a yearly turnover in excess of £200,000, for example.

Dealing with catering contracts, both the initial tender and ongoing monitoring, can leave time-poor staff up to their necks in paperwork and having to make decisions in areas where they do not specialise.

That's why increasing numbers of

school head teachers and managers are choosing consultancies such as Educo to help run key services – entrusting the time-consuming tender process for the selection of catering, cleaning and facilities management contractors to a company with dedicated expertise in the field.

The result in the case of Oaks Park



**WE'RE NOW MAKING A CONSIDERABLE PROFIT, WHICH MAKES IT EASIER TO PAY THE BILLS**

is improved nutritional standards, welcome financial rewards, efficiency of service, better value for money and greater peace of mind.

"We're now making a considerable profit which makes it easier for us to pay the bills and have something to reinvest," says Anne Giardelli, school business manager at Oaks Park. "We initially used Educo as a

consultancy when we went out to tender for our catering facilities in 2009. They had the skills and knowledge to test the market for us and recommended several catering companies that put on a spread. We were then able to make a decision based on the expert advice and what we liked ourselves.

"Educo secured and drew up the contract, and as part of the service they also monitor to make sure standards hold up. They look at trading figures, carry out audits to ensure caterers are skilled and following food guidelines, make sure the quality is kept high and perform on-the-spot checks."

Oaks Park benefited from the establishment of a nil-cost Educo contract which paid a profit share. This meant the school could pass on the financial risk of running the operation, but still draw an income from it.

Educo also ensures that contractors operate within a legal framework that protects quality of service and meets the nutritional standards of the school while addressing all other needs of its pupils.

Giardelli says: "As a business manager, it was great to have Educo do all the donkey work in respect of the tendering process by getting us the best contract available."

"Today we're still using Educo. If we weren't, I don't know if I would have the time and mindset to be able to deal with caterers directly



GETTY

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and keep my eye on the ball. Things could slip and I might not notice, so it makes good sense to use a specialist consultancy to make sure the contract runs smoothly."

Robert Weiner, one of the directors of Educo, says financial rewards for schools are all part of successful contract negotiations.

"We offer the people who run schools enormous benefits in terms of time-saving, nutrition and insider expertise, but there are financial considerations too," he says.

"The size of some secondary schools means there is often an opportunity for inward investment, and for a financial profit on the service which can enhance school budgets.

"In many cases that is a significant contribution well into five figures."

Educo do not just provide catering consultancy, but cover the whole range of support services in schools and colleges.

Cleaning and other essentials such as photocopying and telecoms can also be high-value contracts, where service levels and financial performance need to be regularly managed and audited.

"The vast majority of our business is from client referrals, and that's because we do what we say we will do," Weiner says.

■ For more information, visit [educoco.uk](http://educoco.uk), email [info@educoco.uk](mailto:info@educoco.uk)

## What can Educo do for your school?

The company can manage the tender process for selection of a new catering, cleaning or other facilities management contractor for both state-run and independent primary and secondary schools and further education establishments.

It can also oversee the entire management and monitoring and improvement of new and existing services.

## How does it work?

Educo works with the school to create a bespoke service and contract specification.

It handles all negotiations through to final contract. This protects the school's interests, ensuring improved meals for the students and often provides a financial benefit for the school or college.