

KITCHENS & BATHROOMS

The dawn of the pods



It is important to determine whether there is access for the kitchen pod to be delivered by lorry

Creating suitable kitchen facilities to comply with new standards at an existing school can present a major challenge. Lee Vines explains how pre-fabricated, permanent facilities can offer the ideal solution.

One of the key challenges facing many schools is the need to comply with government-driven nutrition-based food standards within the constraints of existing buildings. Very often there is no suitable space for a kitchen within the existing building — or the only available space may impose undesirable limitations on functionality. Consequently, the most satisfactory option is often to add a new kitchen to the school buildings and this can be achieved in two ways. The traditional way would be to construct a new building from the ground up as an extension to the school but this is costly and extremely disruptive to the school's activities.

What are the options?

A significantly less disruptive — and less costly — approach is to use a fully-equipped pre-fabricated kitchen 'pod' that is sufficiently robust to give a working life of 30 plus years but can be delivered to site and integrated with the existing buildings within just a few days. Both methods are eligible for various sources of extra funding. When considering the kitchen pod approach one of the first things is to decide on a suitable location, which to some extent will depend on size. Here, it is important to determine whether there is access for the building to be delivered by lorry, or whether a crane will

be needed to lift it into place. The location should also be easily and safely accessible to delivery vehicles once the new building is in operation.

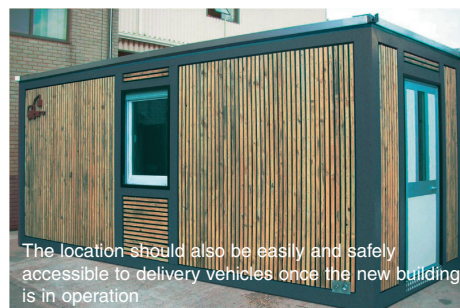
Secondly, will the new building be stand-alone or linked to existing buildings? In the latter case, is there suitable access already, or will additional corridor links need to be created? And will the new building block any existing access routes, fire escape routes or fire assembly points? With the exception of delivering the building, these considerations also apply to buildings being constructed on site.

In parallel with these criteria it is necessary to be clear about the range of activities in the new building as these will influence its overall size. To put this into perspective, a regeneration kitchen with regeneration ovens/microwaves, hot cupboard space and cold storage sufficient for 120 meals per sitting will be approximately 10m². A full hot and cold preparation kitchen able to produce hot locally produced school dinners for hundreds of pupils at one sitting will be around 15m². In most cases, the size of the pod qualifies as a 'permitted development' and is not subject to full planning requirements.

Tailored approach

It is also vital the kitchen is tailored to the needs of each school in terms of cooking and refrigeration equipment, preparation and wash-up areas, staff facilities etc. Needless to say, functionality such as extraction systems and Health and Safety considerations need to be included.

Once delivered to site, the new kitchen will need to be connected to services and commissioned, as well as being aesthetically treated externally to blend with the existing buildings so it does not look like an 'add-on'. This is not quite 'plug and play' but is pretty close and can



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be achieved within a few days — often over a weekend — so there is little or no disruption.

Finding funding

There are various ways in which such building improvements can be funded, either at school level or local authority level. Schools can make use of their Devolved Schools Capital allowance or they can approach their local authority for capital funding. Until 2010/2011 local authority funding includes access to the Targeted Capital Programme for school kitchens. In addition, either the school or the local authority can approach their Regional Development Agency to determine whether a school kitchen will qualify within Regional Economic Strategy and Corporate Plans. Both the Building Schools for the Future (BSF) and Primary Capital Programme may include funding for new kitchens.

When applying for government funding, it can save time if the solution being considered is approved through Buying Solutions. There are also options to buy the new kitchen outright or to choose a contract hire arrangement with fixed monthly payments, where the supplier takes all of the financial risk for the equipment through the life of the kitchen.

Ultimately, the kitchen pod approach presents a greatly simplified and highly cost effective approach to the challenge currently facing many schools. The important thing is to be open-minded about a new approach, consider all of the options and seek specialist advice.

■ With thanks to Lee Vines of PKL Group for preparing this article

For more information about the kitchen pod concept mark Readerlink 105

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