

MARKET INSIGHT



School Catering Q&A

The Future of School Catering: Four Key Questions Answered

Questions by Mike Sawyer (LTC Marketing), answers by Jon Walker, MD, BGL Rieber



'Did You Know?'

- England receives £2.61 per pupil for free school meals.
- Over 500,000 more children will become eligible for free school meals from September 2026.
- A further 500,000 pupils will benefit from the expansion of free breakfast clubs.

How can getting the right equipment help you?

What are the biggest challenges currently facing school catering providers?

Providers of school catering continue to face significant financial pressure. Rising food, energy and labour costs, alongside staff shortages, are forcing many local authorities to review their catering services.

Funding remains a major concern. Schools in England currently receive £2.61 per pupil for free school meals, well below funding levels in Wales (£3.40), Scotland (£3.30) and Northern Ireland (£3.10). England has also seen the smallest funding increase over the past five years, making it increasingly difficult to deliver healthy, nutritious meals within budget.

As demand grows and expectations around nutrition and allergens continue to rise, many in the sector believe increased Government investment is essential to ensure the long-term sustainability of school meals.

How is school catering evolving to meet growing demand?

Demand for school meals is set to increase significantly. From September 2026, more than half a million additional children will become eligible for free school meals through expanded Universal Credit eligibility, while a further half a million pupils will benefit from the Government's free breakfast club programme.

For many schools, particularly smaller or rural sites, this means producing and serving more meals with limited space, staffing and resources.

BGL Rieber helps schools respond to these challenges with practical solutions for food transport, insulated meal delivery and temporary serving facilities. Our regional specialists work closely with schools to recommend equipment that improves efficiency while maintaining food quality and temperature throughout service.

How are changes in Government legislation impacting school catering?

School caterers are also preparing for proposed changes to the School Food Standards, described as the biggest overhaul in a generation. The reforms aim to encourage healthier menus by reducing foods high in fat, salt and sugar, with implementation expected from September 2027 following consultation.

Alongside increasing meal numbers, these changes will require schools to review menus, food preparation and service methods. Having the right equipment and operational processes in place will help providers adapt efficiently while continuing to deliver high-quality meals.

"Demand for school meals is rising, but budgets are not keeping pace."

Continued overleaf



With a capacity of 15-50 meals, the **Rieber Thermoport Canteen** turns a spare space into a temporary service point.



Navioven - Compact school catering oven for flexible food preparation and regeneration.

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What role does innovation and equipment play in improving efficiency and food quality?

Today's school caterers need to do far more than cook meals. Food must be prepared efficiently, transported safely, served at the correct temperature and delivered consistently across multiple locations, all within tight budgets.

At BGL Rieber, we believe there is no one-size-fits-all solution. We work with schools across the UK to provide practical, reliable equipment backed by expert advice, installation support and ongoing training.



Thermoport - ideal solutions for meal distribution, whether serving from a central kitchen, dining hall, satellite serving area, or mobile catering unit.

Our solutions include:

- **Navioven** - mobile ovens for temporary kitchens and additional cooking capacity.
- **Thermoport** insulated food transport systems, including heated transport boxes.
- **NORM Trolley** - heated, refrigerated and ambient meal service trolleys and regeneration.
- **GN containers** - energy-efficient gastronorm pans and Non-Spill lids.
- **Multipolar** - secure communal refrigeration.
- **K-POT** - Mobile food holding and display equipment.
- **Metos Combination Cooking Kettles** with automated stirring and programmable recipes for efficient large-batch cooking.

Whether you need to transport more meals, create additional serving points or improve production efficiency, **BGL Rieber works with you to develop practical, long-term solutions that support both today's challenges and tomorrow's demands.**



CLICK OR SCAN to download our NEW brochure

"Core products for cooking, transporting and serving school food"



K-POT
Transform the way school meals are served

Sources: • www.tes.com/magazine/news/general/why-schools-will-struggle-fund-healthy-school-meals-standards
• educationhub.blog.gov.uk/2026/03/5-things-we-are-doing-to-tackle-child-poverty • educationhub.blog.gov.uk/2025/06/expanding-free-school-meals-what-parents-need-to-know

For information on how BGL Rieber can help your school...

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