



for school kitchens to relieve the pressure on space, as one piece of equipment can do the job of several separate items."

Imagine, for example, replacing kettles, large pots, bratt pans, fryers and griddles. Kille states that this can create 30% or more space in the kitchen, plus, the kit doesn't stand idle because of its many functions.

A combi oven is now so common in a school kitchen that few school cooks will need training in how to use them on a basic level. "Most chefs agree that once you've cooked with a combi-oven you can't go back," says Hogan. "As well as saving space and ensuring lots of tasty dishes are executed to perfection, they are energy efficient and cook up to 70% faster than conventional cooking appliances."

Tracy Hindry, school cook at Aldborough Primary School in Norfolk,

said on cooking with the Rational combi oven newly installed in her school: "The Rational is so easy to learn how to use. We can now put new items on our menu like toad-in-the-hole. My old ovens just weren't hot enough."

For when they do get stuck or need some cooking tips, ClubRATIONAL is a fully interactive web-based community of chefs for chefs where members can access recipes online and share their own ideas.

"A good combi oven can theoretically be the only piece of cooking equipment a caterer really needs, with the capacity to perfectly prepare anything from baked goods at breakfast to rice puddings at lunch," explains Stuart Flint, regional training and demonstration manager at Electrolux Professional. "Not only can this help schools to economise on space and budget by limiting

TOP TIPS

Philip Howard, managing director of Catering Design Group, provides his top tips on buying new school catering equipment

1. Be clear about your menu offer right from the start, as this will impact on kitchen layout, specification of the equipment and your resource requirements
2. Designing the space is critical. Buying random bits of equipment just won't work. The layout and specification of equipment needs to be carefully considered to ensure optimum efficiency of the kitchen (with minimal risk of cross-flows and cross-contamination)
3. What's your space? A big kitchen will be able to house a wide range of equipment to deliver a varied and changeable menu. A smaller operation with limited space will need to consider the flexibility of equipment to satisfy different functions at different times of the day
4. Be clear about your priorities – your choice of equipment can vary considerably dependent upon these: Does the equipment need to last for an extended period? Is budget a key driver? Do your choices meet your environmental objectives in terms of energy efficiency, carbon footprint and resource usage? Is speed of service a major concern?
5. Be wary of over or under specifying. Does the capacity or performance of the equipment suit your resource and operational needs. For example, a dishwasher may well be able to process a certain number of racks per hour, but your operation may not be adequately staffed or designed to take full advantage of this
6. Consider ease of use, operation and cleaning. There is little point buying the latest 'all-singing, all-dancing', high investment equipment if it's complicated to use
7. Ensure you opt for a supplier or manufacturer with adequate UK-based warranty and service back-up (including availability of spare parts). Any long-term equipment breakdown can severely impact your ability to deliver the full menu
8. Consider carefully the benefit of refurbishment versus replacement. While refurbishment would appear to make complete sense on the surface (financially and sustainably), there may well be additional associated costs, such as amendments to ventilation to meet current guidelines
9. Ensure you get value for money. This doesn't necessarily mean opting for the cheapest item. Consider trusted and reliable brands – the initial outlay might be more than a less expensive brand, but savings in terms of down time may far outweigh this difference. Does the supplier offer an extended warranty? Is the supplier backed by the CEDA guarantee?
10. Carefully consider the energy source? Most school cooks prefer to cook with gas (particularly hobs) but careful consideration should be given to more modern, energy efficient electrically powered units, such as induction. This will obviously impact on the overall energy efficiency of the operation