



# Tolworth Girls School, Surbiton

WHILE SCHOOL WAS OUT FOR SUMMER AT TOLWORTH GIRLS SCHOOL, WORK HAD ONLY JUST BEGUN FOR A WELCOME THE GIRLS WOULDN'T FORGET ON THEIR RETURN TO A NEW TERM AS SARAH ALLEN REPORTS

This time last year the dining area for pupils of Tolworth Girls School in Surbiton, Surrey, was described as stale and old.

Decked out with anachronistic, imposingly red chairs and grey tables was the previous dining area for more than 1400 students including sixth formers.

Arguably feeding 1400 people, most of whom are teenagers, is no easy task. But to achieve this in a setting where the students can feel comfortable and even have fun could make the task even harder.

To refurbish the school's restaurant, Tolworth enlisted the support and assistance of GY5, a mainstream national catering consultancy with clients including primary and secondary schools, further and higher education colleges, local authorities and other businesses. The company visited Tolworth in March 2008 to observe break and lunch times at the school. The consultancy then reviewed staffing and finances. Once this was done GY5, lead by Julian Edwards FCSI, entered discussions with Tolworth to produce a report. This draft report was discussed in April.

The report revealed a financial comparison including a detailed breakdown of cost expectations demonstrating a realistic financial base for operating in-house, which the school wanted.

A feasibility study was requested by the school governors who wanted to know whether a move to in-house would be viable. A key factor of this would strongly depend on the enthusiasm and willingness of the school management team to participate in the running of and support for the catering department.

GY5 together with Tolworth and bursar Louise Taylor weighed up the possibilities of contracting the project out compared with kitchen staff pulling their sleeves up and getting involved.

Eventually, the school decided that the latter was the best option. Edwards says: "The kitchen team demonstrated the right qualities to make a go of it."

Edwards admits there was a fair amount of work required to raise the standard of catering at the school.

"Staff required refresher and induction sessions for marketing and merchandising, wider culinary skills, healthy eating, production and presentation methods, income generation and operational practices.

"It should be noted, however, that the key ingredients - enthusiasm, pleasantness, flexibility, basic ability - already existed within the team."

Upon inspection of the school's original dining facilities, Edwards and Tolworth came to the agreement that the restaurant image was not reflective of a good food outlet. They also noticed that there was little culinary theme or effort to attract more custom.

Both came to the conclusion that the facilities would benefit from investment to improve these issues with the help of signage and decoration as well as a better seating plan.

GY5 then researched equipment requirements and liaised with architects on developing a summer programme of work that included enhancing the kitchens with the additions of a Convothem combination oven and an automatic dishwasher, to take place from July to September. Edwards also met with a local Environmental Health Officer for advice.

Overall, GY5's involvement in the project included setting up an operations manual, developing financial management, providing suppliers, basic training, assistance with design and planning and using computer aided design for schemes to explore options on layout and procurement.

Edwards' company also supported the launch preparations and offered area management and office support.

Today 1400 Girls of Tolworth enjoy a stylish dining area, a bright shadow of its former self. Full of colour and energy the new food court, now called 'Munchies', includes two chilled display units and two bains marie. The kitchen now offers a compact design including a back wall cooking suite with a six ring oven hob and convection oven, a dish and pot wash area with a preparation sink, dry stores, staff changing facilities and an office located at the end of the restaurant.

Previously there were no dishwashing facilities, so crockery and cutlery were disposable. The new dishwasher has enabled a reduction in disposable consumption and greater use of real plates and crockery.

Kitchen staff are now able to offer pupils and staff a far greater range of freshly prepared foods.

'Munchies' was launched in October with a grand opening by the deputy Mayor of Kingston. Achieving this in seven months is no mean feat, but the project was made possible with the forward thinking bursar Louise Taylor and the help of GY5.

[www.gy5.co.uk](http://www.gy5.co.uk)

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From reds to riches - a great deal of the transformation was down to the school's kitchen staff pulling their sleeves up and getting involved