



An Roinn Oideachais  
Department of Education

# SDG02 TN-06

## Guidance for Existing Primary Schools in Relation to Facilities for Provision of School Meals

### Technical Note Guidance

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## 1 Introduction

This Design Guidance Technical Note forms part of, and should be read in conjunction with, the Department's suite of technical guidance documents, available at: <https://www.gov.ie/en/service/26960-school-building-and-design/>. Where conflicting guidance is found, school authorities, meal suppliers and their design teams should contact the Department for further direction:

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It is noted that this document is for guidance only and it is the responsibility of the food operator (provider) is to comply with all relevant law whether in relation to building standards, building regulations (as detailed in Technical Guidance Documents Parts A to M inclusive, as published by the Department of housing, Local Government & Heritage) and food law requirements.

Providers are required to demonstrate that designated food rooms meet the requirements of relevant food law. The use of a recognised standard such as NSAI I.S. 340: 2007; 'Hygiene in the Catering Sector'(and any subsequent updated versions) as referenced in this document will assist providers towards meeting food law requirements.

**Note:** This document dated September 2025 is a revision to a previous version dated April 2025; Previous Version Section 4.1.4 Food Hygiene Requirements in Operation – deleted, Previous Version Section 5.1.2 Food Hygiene Requirements in Operation – first paragraph deleted.

### 1.1 Background

The Schools Meals Programme is operated by the Department of Social Protection and provides funding of food services for school children. The purpose of this Technical Guidance Document is to outline the requirements of the Department of Education's Planning & Building Unit (PBU) with respect to the provision of catering facilities within school premises. It sets out the statutory, hygiene facility and Building Regulation requirements that the meals supplier ('the Provider') is required to comply with.

There are currently a number of meal delivery mechanisms that can be provided by catering providers to schools as detailed below:

- Hot and cold meals delivered direct to desks
- Meals fully prepared on site using existing servery catering facilities
- Meals pre-prepared and heated using regeneration facilities in external pods or mobile catering units
- Meals pre-prepared and heated using regeneration facilities located within the school building

This document considers each of these delivery mechanisms in turn and provides guidance as to how these may be impacted by building related statutory requirements such as the Building Regulations, planning consent, health & safety and food law requirements. Its aim is to ensure that compliance where applicable, is achieved.

The requirements as set out in this document should also be read in conjunction with all relevant food law obligations which are under the remit of the Health Service Executive (HSE) Environmental Health Officers and the Food Safety Authority of Ireland (FSAI).

The Department of Education and its Planning & Building Unit is fully supportive of the School Meals Programme and wishes to work with schools and meal providers to ensure that meals can be safely provided to children across our network of excess 3000 primary schools located nationally.

## **1.2 Purpose of this Technical Note**

This document is intended to provide guidance and requirements in relation to the provision of catering facilities within school premises that facilitates the continued roll-out and expansion of the School Meals Programme. It is primarily aimed at the supplier's providing meals to schools under the programme and their building design consultants. It also however provides useful guidance to School Authorities to gain an awareness of the minimum building safety requirements that must be adhered to when contracting suppliers to provide school meals within their premises.

## **1.3 Overview of Contents**

**Section 1** provides information about the purpose and content of this document.

**Section 2** describes the minimum requirements pertaining to meal providers delivering either hot or cold meals directly to pupils at their desks.

**Section 3** outlines the approach that providers are required to implement when using existing school servery facilities (where available).

**Section 4** provides guidance and minimum requirements for providers that are reheating pre-prepared meals using regeneration facilities in either external pods or mobile catering units.

**Section 5** provides guidance and minimum requirements for providers that intend to provide pre-prepared meals using regeneration heating facilities located internally within the school building.

## 2 Hot or Cold Meals Delivered Direct to Desks

In this section, building compliance requirements relating to the provision of either hot or cold meals delivered directly to school desks by the meals provider is considered.

### 2.1 Building Regulations, Food Law and Hygiene in the Catering Sector Compliance

From a Building Regulation and building safety compliance perspective, meals delivered by Providers either hot or cold directly to school desks (i.e. without regeneration heating) are minimally impacted by either of these delivery methods. Providers are required to consider and implement the following however:

- Ancillary items used by the catering providers to take the hot meals from their vehicles into the schools such as insulated boxes, trollies/racks etc. if retained on the school site, are required to be stored in an appropriate location, free from any source of contamination and that does not obstruct corridors, fire escape routes or fire exits.
- If meals are to be temporarily kept in insulated boxes or similar within the school premises immediately in advance of serving, a suitable and appropriate location, free from any source of contamination, shall be agreed with the school authority that is separate to teaching rooms and staffrooms that are in use. Agreed locations shall not block fire escape or circulation routes and should ideally be in a storeroom.
- Delivery vehicles, equipment and containers shall be kept in hygienic conditions (cleaned and disinfected as required) by the meal provider.
- The provider shall carry out a health and safety risk assessment considering issues such as steps, restricted access, uneven surfaces etc. that could impact on the safe transfer of the meals from the vehicles to the classroom desks. Appropriate measures shall be taken to eliminate or mitigate these risks. This could include for example the construction of a safe access ramp at the delivery door access point. Where such works are required, these are to be carried out and costs borne by the meal's provider. They must also be certified in compliance with the relevant section of the Building Regulations.
- As is the case with all the delivery mechanisms listed in this document, food waste management is a key consideration to avoid potential pest infestation, unwanted smells etc. Further guidance in this regard is provided in the National Standards Authority of Ireland publication *I.S. 340: 2007; 'Hygiene in the Catering Sector'*. Providers are required to demonstrate compliance with this standard (and any subsequent updated versions).

### **3 Use of Existing School Servery Facilities**

In this section, building compliance requirements relating to the use of existing servery rooms within a school building for the purposes of regeneration delivery is considered. Not all primary schools will have a General Purpose Room and Servery and therefore should be considered on an individual school case-by-case basis. Servery's can also vary in size and layout. They may not be sufficient to meet the needs, legal requirements and minimum building regulation standards required of regeneration heating.

#### **3.1 Building Regulations, Food Law and Hygiene in the Catering Sector Compliance.**

Meal Providers intending to utilise existing GP room Servery within a school premises are required to ensure that the servery is fully compliant with all current relevant Building Regulations, Fire Safety, Health & Safety Legislation, Hygiene and Food Law requirements and Statutory Design Codes. This may require the meals provider to carryout refurbishment or upgrade building works to the existing facilities. The costs associated with any required building works will be borne by the provider.

Any refurbishment or upgrade works must be designed and certified on completion by an appropriately experienced design team engaged by the provider. The design team shall comprise of a Registered Architect, Fire Engineering Consultant and Chartered Mechanical & Electrical Engineer as a minimum. Where structural modifications within the school are envisaged (e.g. wall openings for mechanical extraction etc.) the services of a Chartered Structural Engineer shall also be included. The provider must ensure that the space available within the servery is sufficient for the nature and extent of the activities being carried out without compromising the requirements as set out in food law e.g. Annex II of Regulations (EC) No 852 of 2004 and I.S. 340 'Hygiene in the Catering Sector'.

The General Purpose (GP) Room Servery in Primary Schools is not intended to function as a full catering facility. The installation by the meal providers in the space of equipment such as refrigerated storage units and regeneration ovens for the re-heating of pre-prepared meals shall be carried out in accordance with all relevant statutory regulations and standards. This shall include (but not limited to) ensuring adequate electrical supply, which may require upgrade of cabling to the distribution board. Installation/upgrade of mechanical ventilation and lighting is also required in accordance with the requirements as set out in Annex II of Regulations (EC) No 852 of 2004 and I.S. 340 'Hygiene in the Catering Sector'. Mechanical and Electrical Services installed in the GP Room Servery and as required for any equipment provided by the supplier, must be compliant with all statutory regulations and the Department of Education Technical Guidance Document TGD-030.

The installation and management of these facilities should be fully compliant with all relevant food law requirements of the Health Service Executive (HSE) Environmental Health Officers and the Food Safety Authority of Ireland (FSAI). The supplier is responsible for the safety, upkeep and statutory maintenance checks of all equipment provided and used by them and under their control in the GP Room Servery.

Where not already provided, a separate wash hand basin for the cleaning of hands are be provided with hot and cold running water, materials for cleaning hands and for hygienic drying in the GP Room Servery. All surface finishes within the GP Room Servery should be easily cleaned, durable and non-absorbent. Suppliers are required to ensure the GP Room Servery is pest proof including door seals flush with thresholds and all service ducts fully sealed. Access & door widths should be adequate to facilitate installation and maintenance of equipment.

The School Authority does not have any responsibility regarding the operation of the meals provided from within the servery, as this rests with the provider. It is recommended however, that the Authority advises their insurers both from a building's insurance and liability perspective.

## **4 Regeneration Heating Facilities within External Pods or Mobile Catering Units**

In this section, building compliance requirements relating to the installation of both external building pods and mobile catering facilities are considered.

For the purposes of this document an external pod shall mean a prefabricated or modular unit installed in the grounds of a school for the purposes of regeneration heating of school meals. The unit, though temporary in nature shall be fitted with hot and cold mains water, electrical supply and waste drainage connection.

A mobile catering facility shall mean a self-contained mobile unit (on wheels) for the purposes of regeneration heating of school meals. Such a unit will have its own potable water supply and shall not necessarily require mains water or drainage connections. Electrical supply from the school to the unit is envisaged however. Units shall be equipped with handwashing facilities and wastewater facilities that meet the required standards.

### **4.1 External Pod Regeneration Facilities**

External pod regeneration building facilities located within a school grounds may provide an efficient and innovative alternative when it is not practical or feasible to deliver meals directly to the desk. External pods may also be suitable where there is no appropriate space within the school building to locate an internal regeneration facility, as frequently is the case with existing primary schools where space is at a premium, or where existing GP room servery's are not available.

The provider shall notify the Health Service Executive (HSE) in writing of any significant changes in activities. This includes, but is not limited to, installing new equipment or structures (such as a pod) or ceasing any activities.

It is imperative that the use of pod facilities is considered within the context of the existing and future functionality of the school. The location of pod facilities shall be agreed with the School Authority in advance of entering into contract. The agreed location for the Pod should not unduly impact on external space such as hardstanding play areas that offer recreation space to pupils. The pod's location shall not affect food safety nor the ability to maintain meals at the appropriate temperature.

The location of pods shall also not impede the possible future expansion of the school for provision of additional mainstream or SEN classrooms. They should therefore be located in areas away from the building footprint, where future extensions are likely to be located. Pods need to be considered temporary facilities. The Department of Education Planning & Building Unit may need to request the relocation or removal of Pods should they be found to impact on school operation or expansion needs. Such relocation or removal will be at the cost of the hot school meal provider.

The School Authority does not have any responsibility regarding the installation, operation and removal of Pod facilities and all associated works therein. It is recommended however, that the Authority advises their insurers both from a building's insurance and liability perspective.

All costs associated with the provision, installation, maintenance and operation of the external pod regeneration unit will be borne by the provider.

#### **4.1.1 Statutory Regulation Compliance**

The location, composition, installation and maintenance of Pods are required to be in full compliance with statutory (Planning, Fire Safety and DAC) regulations. The meals provider will be responsible for applying for statutory consents and all associated fees, contributions and meeting of conditions.

#### **4.1.2 Hygiene in the Catering Sector Compliance**

The internal layout of the pod facilities must be appropriately designed to accommodate the intended volume and range of food prepared by the meal provider, ensuring safe practices in the delivery, storage, handling, and service of food. Annex II of Regulations (EC) No 852 of 2004 and the National Standard I.S. 340:2007 'Hygiene in the Catering Sector' (and any subsequent amendments) applies to all Pod layouts. This shall include (but not limited to) section 4.D. Premises and Structure and will include appropriate floor, walls and ceiling finishes, hand washing facilities, hot and cold water supply, easy to clean work surfaces, washable non-slip flooring, refrigeration and regeneration oven facilities, fire detection/alarm, ventilation (section 4.E.) and staff sanitary facilities (where not already available in close proximity).

The meal provider shall be responsible for providing temperature probes to check incoming temperatures, refrigeration unit temperatures, and regeneration temperatures. The provider must also ensure that these temperature probes are calibrated on a regular basis.

#### **4.1.3 Building Regulation Compliance**

Prior to award of contract, the Provider is required to provide to the school authority evidence that the Pod facility that is to be installed at the school has been designed and prefabricated in accordance with all Building Regulations. Likewise, all site works must be certified as Building Regulation complaint on completion of the Pod installation and prior to operation.

The Provider is responsible for all associated siteworks and service connections to the Pod facility. This shall generally include (but not limited to) safe access, electrical supply, water connection, wastewater connection to the school drainage system. The provider shall also be responsible for the full reinstatement of the site and services upon removal of the Pod on completion of the contract.

Electrical cabling between the external Pod and school building from a safety perspective is required to be undergrounded. All electrical connections to the school's distribution board shall be carried out and certified by a qualified electrician. The meals provider is required to employ

a Mechanical & Electrical Consultant to oversee and certify the electrical works and carryout an assessment of the existing distribution board capacity to cater for the additional electrical load associated with the Pod. Where sufficient capacity does not exist, the provider shall be responsible for the works and costs associated with upgrading the existing distribution board.

## 4.2 Mobile Catering Units

The use of a mobile catering unit to house the regeneration heating and other equipment associated with hot meals delivery may be considered as an alternative option to an external pod facility. It is envisaged that a mobile facility may be exempt from statutory planning consent, however the provider is required to engage with the Local Authority in this regard and comply with their requirements accordingly.

Mobile units shall be placed in a location that has the least impact on the school's utilisation of external play spaces for pupils.

While a mobile unit may not require mains water and drainage connections, it is likely that an electrical supply from the school will be required. Electrical cabling between the mobile unit and school building from a safety perspective is required to be undergrounded. All electrical connections to the school's distribution board shall be carried out and certified by a qualified electrician. The meals provider is required to employ a Mechanical & Electrical Consultant to oversee and certify the electrical works and carryout an assessment of the existing distribution board capacity to cater for the additional electrical load associated with the mobile unit. Where sufficient capacity does not exist, the provider shall be responsible for the works and costs associated with upgrading the existing distribution board.

The internal layout of the mobile catering unit must be appropriately designed to accommodate the intended volume and range of food prepared by the meal provider, ensuring safe practices in the delivery, storage, handling, and service of food. Annex II of Regulations (EC) No 852 of 2004 and I.S. 340 'Hygiene in the Catering Sector'. Installation/upgrade of mechanical ventilation and lighting is also required in accordance with the requirements as set out Annex II of Regulations (EC) No 852 of 2004 and I.S. 340 'Hygiene in the Catering Sector'.

The School Authority should advise its insurers of the installation and operation of either an external pod or mobile unit within its premises from a building's insurance and liability perspective.

All costs associated with the provision and installation of the mobile catering unit will be borne by the provider.

Pest control responsibility must be clearly defined, including identifying who is responsible for implementing and maintaining pest control measures, ensuring regular inspections are conducted, and taking corrective actions as necessary to prevent pest infestations.

## 5 Regeneration Heating Facilities Located within the School Building

In this section, building compliance requirements relating to the conversion of an existing unused room within a primary school building to a regeneration heating facility is considered. Subject to available and appropriate space requirements, it may be feasible for the regeneration heating of meals to take place within an existing school building. As with the other regeneration delivery options already discussed, there are a number of statutory building and food safety regulations that must be complied with.

The School Authority does not have any responsibility regarding the installation and operation of internal regeneration facilities and all associated works required therein. It is necessary however, that the Authority advises their insurers both from a building's insurance and liability perspective.

All costs associated with the regeneration heating facilities located within the school building will be borne by the provider.

### 5.1 Hygiene in the Catering Sector Compliance & Location Considerations

Full regeneration facilities within a school building are required to be compliant with food law and in particular with Annex II of the Regulation (EC) No. 852/2004 on the hygiene of foodstuffs. This shall include (but not limited to) adequate hand washing facilities, (running hot and cold-water supply), easy to clean and disinfect work surfaces, washable non-slip flooring, refrigeration and regeneration oven facilities, fire detection & wired alarm, ventilation and staff sanitary facilities. The installation, management and operation of these facilities should be fully compliant with the requirements laid down in Annex II of the Regulation (EC) No 852/2004 on the hygiene of foodstuffs and The National Standard I.S. 340:2007 'Hygiene in the Catering Sector' (and any subsequent amendments). This includes ensuring that the layout, design, construction, and size of food premises allow for good hygiene practices, protect from the risk of contamination, and provide suitable equipment for the storage, handling, preparation, cooking/ reheating, and service of food.

Particular attention is drawn to the applicable sub-sections of section 4 relating to building requirements, operational requirements and services/utilities, including (but not limited to):

- 4.D.1 General Requirements
- 4.D.2 Surfaces
- 4.D.4 Structures (Floors, Walls, Ceilings, Windows and Doors)
- 4.D.5 Equipment
- 4.E.1 General
- 4.E.2 Water Supply
- 4.E.7 Washing Facilities
- 4.E.8 Drainage
- 4.E.9 Waste Management
- 4.E.10 Lighting

- 4.E.11 Ventilation
- 4.F Pest Control

The facilities & equipment provided for the storage, handling and regeneration of pre-prepared meals must be provided in a dedicated room or area where access can be controlled and limited to appropriate personnel only and in a manner that always ensures the safety of all students and staff of the school. Standalone refrigeration and regeneration ovens without the associated facilities outlined above is prohibited. Likewise, corridors, stair landings, any common, circulation, assembly areas and fire escape routes must not be used for the location of any regeneration facilities or food equipment as this will compromise the safety of staff and pupils in the event of a fire.

The proposed location of regeneration facilities within a school building must be agreed with the School Authority in advance of making a tender submission or entering into contract. The regeneration unit design must be able accommodate the intended volume and range of food to be produced, to ensure safe practices in delivery, storage, handling, preparation, cooking, reheating and service. This unit should not be used for any other purposes.

Only where adequate space provision is available should internal regeneration option be considered, otherwise other options as already identified in this guidance document should be explored.

### **5.1.1 Building Regulation Compliance**

The Meals Provider shall be responsible for the design, installation and maintenance of regeneration facilities within the school building. The provider is required to engage the services of a design team, with the appropriate expertise, consisting of a Registered Architect, Fire Engineering Consultant and Chartered Mechanical & Electrical Engineer as a minimum. Where structural modifications within the school are envisaged (e.g. wall openings for mechanical extraction etc.) the services of a chartered Structural Engineer should also be included. The following are also minimum requirements to ensure compliance with the Building Regulations:

- All works carried out in relation to the installation of regeneration facilities within the school building are to be fully certified by the Providers design team to be in full compliance with the Building Regulations.
- Rooms that are to be used for regeneration facilities within the school building are to be fully fire compartmented, providing a minimum 1-hour fire rating. This shall include walls, fire door and service penetrations. Providers shall be responsible for engaging with the Local Authority fire officer where required. Should a change of use instigate the need for a fire safety certificate, the Provider shall be responsible for the application, costs and subsequently meeting with the conditions stipulated in the fire safety conditions.
- Rooms where regeneration facilities are being provided shall be fitted with mechanical ventilation in accordance with I.S. 340 requirements. Any ductwork located through fire compartment walls shall be appropriately fire sealed.

- On completion of the regeneration facilities installation the Provider is required to furnish to the School Authority a safety file. This shall include (but not limited to) as-built drawings, data sheets on electrical usage of equipment, electrician certificates, fire stopping certification etc.
- The Meals Provider will be responsible for upgrade of the electrical distribution board where required to cater for the increased electrical load resulting from the installation of regeneration oven(s) and other facilities such as refrigeration units. Electrical connection for regeneration facilities shall be taken back fully to the distribution board. Providers are not permitted to use existing school electrical cabling to supply regeneration ovens and equipment unless inspected and certified by the providers M&E Consultant as being suitable and regulation compliant.
- The Provider shall be responsible for ensuring the correct life safety systems, fire and smoke detection are installed and integrated into the school's alarm system in accordance with Building Regulation requirements.
- The Provider is responsible for restoring all existing areas that are impacted by the regeneration facilities works e.g. floor coverings and floor slab make-up affected by drainage connections, ceiling tiles damaged by overhead mechanical and electrical services etc. All works associated with the installation of regeneration facilities will be carried out during school holidays, at weekends or after school hours. No works can be permitted to take place during school hours.

### **5.1.2 Food Hygiene Requirements in Operation**

The Meals Provider is also required to ensure the room used for the regeneration facilities is pest proof including door seals flush with thresholds and all service ducts fully sealed and shall ensure access & door widths are adequate to facilitate installation and maintenance of all equipment.

The installation and management of these facilities must comply with the requirements set out in Annex II of Regulation (EC) No 853/2004 on the hygiene of foodstuffs. This includes ensuring that the layout, design, construction, and size of the premises support good hygiene practices, minimize the risk of contamination, and provide appropriate equipment for the storage, handling, preparation, cooking/reheating, and service of food. The supplier will be totally responsible for the safety, upkeep and statutory maintenance checks of all equipment provided and used by them and under their control within the Regeneration Heating room facility.

## 6 Summary

As this guidance has outlined, there are several different meal delivery mechanisms being provided by catering suppliers to schools. The most suitable method will vary from school to school and can depend on location, pupil numbers, existing servery provision or available space either externally or internally to accommodate regeneration facilities.

Each option will have varying requirements in relation to how building safety and compliance with Building Regulations can be achieved. This can also vary from school to school depending on existing infrastructure, building fabric etc.

It is essential therefore that the meal providers who are tendering and entering contract with School Authorities to provide meals consider each school on a case-by-case basis taking into consideration the full extent of building works to be undertaken to ensure building compliance and above all that the safety of children and school staff is always maintained.

This guidance document is not meant to be an exhaustive list of requirements, but rather sets out the principal parameters that meal providers shall take into consideration to safely provide meals within our primary school communities. It is the responsibility of the food operator (provider) is to comply with all relevant law whether in relation to building standards, building regulations or food law requirements.

<END>