



Thomas's London Day Schools

Thomas's is a family-run group of co-educational independent schools in central London, which seek to give an exceptional start in life to more than 2,000 children between the ages of two and 16. Its development into the outstanding group of schools and services that it is today is the direct result of one family's determined search for a broader, kinder and more creative approach to education.

Background

In 2022, Litmus was approached by Operations Director Matt Nicholl to undertake a Best Value Review and options appraisal of the Thomas's catering services across its five school locations. After many years of excellent service, the Catering General Manager had decided to retire, and Thomas's needed to decide whether to remain in-house or outsource. The group was also expanding its portfolio of schools and buildings and needed its support services to be able to flex to meet the increasing demands that growth brings.

Brief

The objectives of the project were to:

- ▶ Benchmark the competitiveness of food procurement against achievable best value benchmarks and what the food procurement costs might be if the services were outsourced.
- ▶ Benchmark all other catering costs against industry norms, identifying where cost-efficiencies might be achieved.
- ▶ Consider whether the management structure provided the resilience needed to support growing catering activities.
- ▶ Report on the operational findings compared to best practice, including a summary of stakeholder views, with recommendations for improvement.
- ▶ Produce an options appraisal of the service models open to the schools, and the likelihood of each in achieving the schools' objectives.

Approach

The review was conducted by Litmus Education Consultancy Director Joe Parfitt in a highly collaborative way, drawing on the knowledge and experience of the current catering teams. He also engaged with key stakeholders at the school, including parent members of the PTA, to identify the existing challenges and future opportunities. Desk-based reviews of data and independent food procurement benchmarks were commissioned, and time was spent at each school reviewing the facilities, equipment and service delivery. A key part of the process was understanding the complexity of the schools' requirements and considering how consistency could be delivered across the group whilst accommodating school and age-appropriate needs.

Outcomes

A comprehensive report was produced which concluded:

- ▶ There were opportunities for food procurement savings and potentially a cost-neutral shift to outsourcing, if desired.
- ▶ The need for additional management/administrative support for the General Manager's role and dedicated senior chef support to develop the craft skills of the team and maintain consistency across the schools.
- ▶ Outsourcing as the most likely model to meet Thomas's objectives faster and with greater likelihood of the changes being sustained following departure of the current General Manager.

The findings of the review were accepted by Thomas's and Litmus was commissioned to manage the catering tender in partnership with the school. A contract was awarded in April 2022 on cost-neutral terms that supported the vision of the Thomas's group.

Litmus have now been commissioned to conduct a similar best value review of the cleaning services.

▶▶ *Joe managed and supported the group catering review and tender in a professional and pragmatic manner; which gave the school comfort that it had approached the change from in-house catering to outsourced with all the due diligence and planning the process required.* ◀◀

Matthew Nicholl, Operations Director



For more information about Litmus get in touch:

Email us at mailbox@litmuspartnership.co.uk

www.litmuspartnership.co.uk