



ALABAS

Commercial Building Services

Reliability, set in stone

Finding the right building contractor for your school construction or refurbishment project

Why choosing the best contractor for your project is so important

Cost effectiveness

By this we mean the best value rather than the cheapest, as a cheap job may mean a contractor is cutting corners. The optimum contractor for you will be the one who meets your specified requirements fully in a way that doesn't cost you a fortune.

Efficacy

Working with a contractor you can trust means that you won't have to spend all your time supervising. The right contractor will keep you up to date to an agreed schedule so that you don't feel like you have to micromanage them.



Safety for pupils, staff and visitors

The right contractor will have the training and policies in place to ensure that their work doesn't put others at risk.

Peace of mind

A well-run project from a reliable building contractor will not cause you the headaches and worry that can sometimes accompany a building project.

Checklist – What to look out for when choosing a contractor

✓ Accreditations

These are a blunt tool on their own but do give some reassurance. Some of the ones to look out for are below:



Having a DBS checked person on site helps to ensure your pupils are not at risk.



Accreditation provides clients with the reassurance that their chosen contractor operates ethically and within legal guidelines.



The Building Safety Group

Membership of the UK's largest building safety group indicates a company is committed to driving continuous improvement in health, safety and environmental performance.



✓ Previous work with schools

Has the contractor previously worked with schools? Do they have testimonials they can show you, or clients that you can call for a reference?

✓ Response to the brief

Do they answer all specifications laid out in the brief fully and clearly within their quote? If not, then this should be a red flag – unexpected costs or unforeseen problems may rear their ugly head.

✓ Proactivity in finding solutions

This could be demonstrated at proposal stage by suggestions about how things might be done more effectively, or planned working schedules based around the school day or in school holidays.

✓ Do you like them?

You are potentially going to be meeting with them on a regular basis, so having a good relationship is important.



Practical steps

1. If the project is going to tender, consider a pre-tender interview as part of the pre-qualification process, for all the contractors you are considering to:
 - Assess their understanding of the project.
 - Understand their likely approach to the project.
 - Find out about their current workload.
 - Decide whether you think you could work with them constructively. Do they exhibit enthusiasm?
 - Clarify ambiguities on either side.
2. If the project does not need to go to tender (e.g. for smaller construction or refurbishment projects) it is still worth undertaking a pre-quote interview with the contractors that you are considering working with.
3. Tender process:
 - Ensure that all contractor queries are answered quickly and fully to ensure you get the most complete response to tenders. Consider sending out any answers to all contractors if it is something that was not clear on the tender document.
 - Assess tenders on receipt using the above checklist and consider further interviews if required. This is more likely if pre-tender interviews were not completed.
 - Enter negotiations with your preferred tenderer and let the others know the situation. You may want to consider retaining a reserved tenderer in the event the negotiations are not successful.
4. Once the contractor is chosen, agree the method and frequency of regular communication with them so expectations can be set and met (e.g. weekly meetings).
5. Review the project both during and post completion to ensure any problems are dealt with quickly, and also decide at this stage whether you would be happy to use them for future projects and document it.

Conclusion

School construction and refurbishment projects are often a big investment for the school or local authority, so finding a contractor that you are happy can do the job required, offers good value and causes the minimum disruption to learning is vital. The steps above will help you to be confident that the contractor you choose is likely to deliver a project which runs smoothly and provides a successful end result.



If you would like to discuss an upcoming project or have an informal chat before you even decide whether to scope a project, please contact us:

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