



School Food Matters

"Conversations with Canvassers"

With only three weeks remaining of the General Election campaign, you may have already met canvassers - party activists and volunteers - going door to door asking for your vote.

While many people find this irritating ("I just want to eat my dinner in peace!"), party canvassers play an important role in the political system. They are there not only to communicate the ideas and policies of their party to you, the voter; but also to feed back the views and feelings of the people in the community back to Party HQ.

In our Election Manifesto 2019, we identified five key areas we would like all parties to focus on. Below are some questions you can ask canvassers to help raise the importance of healthy school meals during the election.

Area #1 - School Food Standards must be made mandatory across all schools and Early Years settings without exception.

The introduction of the School Food Standards has undoubtedly improved the quality of meals served in schools; however, various loopholes in legislation mean that currently around 4,000 academies are not obliged to comply.

***Question:** What will your party do to ensure all school children have access to healthy, sustainable school meals?*

Open ended questions like this are more likely to elicit an honest response, as opposed to what the canvasser thinks you want to hear. However, if you feel they are being too vague, feel free to ask them directly!

***Alternate Question:** Will you ensure the School Food Standards are mandatory across all schools and Early Years settings, without exception?*

Area #2 - Establish a new, mandatory, stand-alone subject: Food Education

Cooking was added to the curriculum in 2014, but implementation has been patchy - even Ofsted's own thematic review shows that only 26% of the primary schools sampled "offered activities such as cooking". We believe the time is right to establish a dedicated subject that covers the skills needed for children and young people to keep themselves healthy and become informed consumers

***Question:** What will your party do to ensure children and young people learn about food, and develop the skills to be healthy and informed consumers?*

Area #3 - Reform Free School Meals policy

The free school meal (FSM) allocation of £2.30 has not kept pace with the price of food, especially when healthier items are often the most expensive. We believe the value must be increased to match rising costs, and should be adjusted to allow unspent allowance to be rolled over, instead of being absorbed back into the school budget.

We also recommend auto-enrolment for eligible families, so that school meals reach the families that need them most; and a 'rebrand' of the programme, to help reduce stigma.

Question: *What is your party's policy on free school meals, holiday programmes and free breakfasts for our most vulnerable children?*

Additional Question: *Will you raise the value of free school meals to keep up with rising costs? Will you make sure that eligible families are automatically enrolled?*

Area #4 - Better Public Sector Procurement

The Government can lead by example in supporting local growers, improving food quality and reducing waste by mandating the use of local, seasonal, pesticide-free produce for all Government-funded food schemes such as the *School Fruit and Vegetable Scheme*. We also recommend the introduction of a meat-free day across all public sector procurement - which has the dual benefit of improving diets, and making menus more climate friendly.

Question: *What will your party do to make sure that public sector catering contracts (schools, hospitals, prisons) are more climate-friendly?*

Additional Question: *Will your party mandate local, seasonal produce for Government-funded food schemes?*

Area #5 - Reducing consumption of Sugary Drinks

The introduction of the Sugary Drinks Industry Levy (SDIL) has seen encouraging results; but there is more work to do. The SDIL should be extended to cover juice- and milk-based drinks that have added sugar; and the money raised through this levy must be 'ring-fenced' so it can only be spent on projects that will improve children's health.

We believe drinking fountains and/or refill stations in schools would be an excellent use of money raised through the SDIL. This would help to normalise free tap water as the default for hydration; and would represent meaningful action on single use plastics, if paired with a ban on bottled water in schools.

Question: *Where does your Party stand on the Sugary Drinks Industry Levy (SDIL)? Will you ensure it is ring-fenced to spend on children's health?*

Additional Question: *What is your party's position on bottled water in schools?*

Good luck!