

# 'TOO HUNGRY TO LEARN'

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At Swallowcliffe School in Adelaide's northern suburbs, it is not uncommon for students to come to class tired and without food in their stomachs.

Swallowcliffe, which has students from preschool to year 6 in Davoren Park, is more disadvantaged than 89 per cent of schools Australia-wide, according to national data.

Education Minister Blair Boyer visited Swallowcliffe twice this week as he joined education ministers from NSW, Victoria, Queensland and the ACT in Canberra on Wednesday in a bid for more funding for public schools.

Swallowcliffe principal Penny Sweeney said changes at the school "can't happen without money".

"It's very frustrating but I wouldn't have been out here this many years if I didn't think there was hope and ways we could make change for these students," Ms Sweeney said.

Teacher Emily D'Antini, who has been at the school for almost a decade, said "the biggest issue" is children coming to school hungry and tired.

"If you haven't fuelled your body for your activity for the day it's really hard to be engaging," the year 2 teacher said.

"Children are struggling to stay awake and maintaining attention throughout learning.

"In an ideal world I'd have a magic wand and I could wave it and change it but I try to do the best that I can do."

Charity Kickstart for Kids provides food such as fruit, toast and cereal to make sure students make it through the day.

Despite the challenges, Swallowcliffe preschool co-ordinator Tatum Finlay said she is motivated by making a change and recalled a boy in her reception class last year who was routinely "flipping tables and swearing".

But after developing a “very explicit and simple routine” she started to see a change in his behaviour.

“He learned to build trust with the educators and he has just excelled,” Ms Finlay said of the student, who is now in year 1. The Education Minister described Swallowcliffe as “a school doing incredible things under very difficult circumstances”.

“I have ... watched up close the challenges our educators, SSOs and school leaders face every single day,” he said.

“This is where the magic can actually happen.

“But it can’t happen without more funding.”

Currently the federal government funds 20 per cent of the Schooling Resource Standard, the minimum amount necessary to meet the needs of all students which was set 11 years ago by business leader David Gonski.

The state government funds 75 per cent and have been petitioning for the commonwealth to cover the 5 per cent shortfall, which is equal to about \$190m annually for SA public schools.

Federal Education Minister Jason Clare has offered to boost the commonwealth’s share of funding from 20 per cent to 22.5 per cent, leaving a 2.5 per cent shortfall.

Mr Boyer said it was “not unreasonable” to ask the federal government to fund the 5 per cent shortfall.

Mr Clare said Australia’s education system “can be a lot better and a lot fairer” with greater funding and that he hopes to reach an agreement with the state government.

“This funding will be tied to reforms to help kids catch up, keep up and finish school,” he said.