

# Malnutrition linked to poor academic performance

From early foetal life into adulthood, a large number of South African children experience poor nutrition in their daily lives. The problem is particularly prevalent in rural areas and informal settlements. Malnutrition is primarily the result of food insecurity in the household, which is directly linked to poverty conditions, and consequently poor academic performance.



© Paul Hakimata – [123RF.com](https://www.123RF.com)

Pearl Mphuthi, FNB Fund Manager says, "The FNB Fund Primary Education Programme, an initiative of the FirstRand Foundation, is designed to help improve education. The fund hopes to achieve this by following three main courses of action. The first is helping management in schools to become more effective; the second is helping teachers to develop their skills; and the third is helping teachers to identify and support students with learning barriers and how to and where to refer these students, if necessary.

"Learning barriers do not just mean physical barriers, such as physical disabilities; there are some learners who experience invisible barriers; for example, learners who can't concentrate because of hunger."

The FNB Fund Primary Education Programme is currently working in partnership with 20 schools in the Free State, and another 20 in KwaZulu-Natal.

Poor nutrition negatively affects the learning capacity and physical development of a child and has serious consequences

for adult productivity and the economic development of society as a whole. To secure sustained improvement in nutrition-related health in children, proper implementation of appropriate policies and adequately resourced intervention programmes, is of crucial importance.

"The programme aims to train teachers to identify students affected by malnutrition, as well as assisting them in what they can do to help these learners. The key to helping learners in these situations is to engage the parents and caregivers in the process. There is a joint responsibility between parents and educators in supporting children to learn."

The government already provides nutritional support to all learners of no-fee-paying schools through the national school nutrition programme (NSNP). Extensive as it is, the NSNP is only able to ensure one nutritious meal per learner per school day (valued at around R3 per meal). Addressing malnutrition requires a sustained and concerted effort from parents, teachers and wellness professionals.

It is hoped that by identifying individual learners for special attention and contracting their parents directly, teachers will manage to get parents more involved in their child's education and nutritional wellness.

"For a parent, there is a lot of meaning in knowing that their child has been identified out of a whole class for help and this helps them also to take part in the child's development. It is also important to stress that what is often referred to as parental apathy may in fact not be a lack of desire to help their children, but rather a lack of knowledge of how to help them. A mutual partnership between the parents and teacher can be of great benefit to the learners," concludes Mphuthi.

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>