

SMACK FOR STATE LAWS

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SOUTH Australia must fall into line with jurisdictions around the world and ban the smacking of children, Children & Young People Commissioner Helen Connolly says.

Ms Connolly said while such punishment was banned in all SA schools, an outdated law allowed parents to use corporal punishment, such as smacking, in the home.

“If it’s not OK to use physical force on adults then why is it OK to use it on children? It doesn’t make any sense,” she said. “Corporal punishment is not a necessary punishment and we have research that clearly shows it is associated with harming children – not disciplining them.

“What we need to be doing is equipping parents with positive parenting strategies and techniques that work, and which will mean they won’t resort to using physical force which we know doesn’t work.

“The evidence is clear that use of physical force can create bigger issues around anxiety and depression in our kids that can have lifelong consequences.”

Yesterday Ms Connolly released seven reports on the state’s progress towards fulfilling obligations made by the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child.

In regards to physical punishment, she said SA should explicitly prohibit corporal punishment in all settings, including the home, in public and detention centres.

Under SA law, parents and guardians can physically punish children, if the contact is generally regarded as acceptable within the community. Parents also have the common law defence of chastisement.

Ms Connolly noted SA and Australia were “out of step” with 63 jurisdictions around the world as of August, which had prohibited corporal punishment in any setting.

The other reports examined the state’s progress on child health, justice, protection, education, disability and the environment, on behalf of the 369,400 young people in SA.

While Ms Connolly found “some evidence of progress”, there was still a long way to go before SA met all of its international obligations.

Of particular concern were the 80,374 notifications made to the Child Abuse Report Line this year and the 4740 children in care – both increases on the previous five years.

Aboriginal children coming into contact with the justice system was still disproportionately high, with 890 minors arrested and detained in adult watch houses in SA in 2021.

And the high rate of teenagers aged 12-17 years who required mental health support presenting to emergency departments showed a shortfall in resources. The reports were released to coincide with International Human Rights Day on Saturday.

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