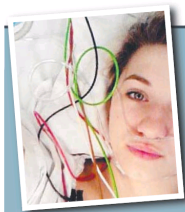


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BULLSEYE: Port Adelaide resident Joel Nelson goes to the rescue of a man being gored by a bull at the San Fermin festival in Pamplona, Spain.

Picture: AP PHOTO/ALVARO BARRIENTOS

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# NO MORE NAUGHTY CORNER

Discipline at school compared to abuse of human rights

**TIM WILLIAMS**  
EDUCATION REPORTER

THE naughty corner and disciplinary suspensions in schools may be human rights abuses against children, according to South Australian academics who will present their concerns to a national summit on child behaviour.

UniSA behaviour experts say suspending or continually excluding children from classrooms could be breaching their fundamental right to an education.

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# No more 'time out'

## FROM PAGE 1

UniSA will next week host the Behaviour in Australian Schools summit, which is being sponsored by the Education Department and will include a public lecture from National Children's Commissioner Megan Mitchell, connecting human rights and behaviour management.

The experts say practices such as shouting at students and sending them to "time outs" in classroom corners could breach the international Convention on the Rights of the Child, under which school discipline must protect children's "human dignity".

Summit organisers Dr Anna Sullivan and Professor Bruce Johnson, from UniSA's School of Education, said the "provocative" human rights focus aimed to shift the blame for bad behaviour from students and parents to systemic failures in schools.

"We think some of the practices undertaken in schools from a conservative approach privilege the rights of the group over the rights of the individual," Prof Johnson said.

"It's too easy to say the child's naughty, defiant, oppositional ... or there is deficiency in the kid's parenting.

"You build relationships with kids, you treat them fairly, you talk to them a lot, you don't cause an escalation over minor things (and) you negotiate with them."

Prof Johnson said many schools managed student behaviour well but the "dominant discourse" across the education system was still about control and punishment. That affected young teachers despite their learning about modern classroom management at university.

"It comes from the folklore of teaching: That if you don't get tough in the first three

months you'll go under, they'll walk all over you," he said.

Dr Sullivan, an expert in learning environments, said continually removing children from classrooms for disciplinary reasons "may be a breaching of their rights".

She said many schools relied on "stepped" systems of escalating punishments that her own teacher surveys showed were ineffective.

"The more they get behind, the more they get disconnected from their classmates and the problem just exacerbates," she said.

Dr Sullivan questioned the peer shaming of children for bad behaviour in schools, such as putting their names under "sad face" signs on classroom boards, when it would never be acceptable in adult workplaces.

"Could you imagine if your boss did that? Why are we doing that to children?" she said.

Dr Sullivan said schools needed the power to deal with the most difficult students for the sake of their peers' learning and safety, but more attention should be given to preventing bad behaviour.

SA Primary Principals Association president Pam Kent said engaging students was the key to better behaviour but "even the best teachers are challenged by the most difficult students".

"Primary teachers want all children to succeed and punitive measures are not things we like to use. Sometimes it gets to the point where it's not so much punitive action but respite for the class and the teacher," she said.

SA Association of State School Organisations director David Knuckey said more parents were much more likely to complain about schools not having the powers to deal with cyberbullies and, to a lesser ex-

tent, disruptive students, than worry about their rights.

"There may be some legal and humanitarian issues but that's certainly not what we are hearing from parents. There is that perception that there isn't enough done," he said.

Children's Commissioner Megan Mitchell was not available for comment but an abstract of her planned speech provided by UniSA states: "Schools have a responsibility to create an environment which respects the inherent dignity of each child, including when dealing with behaviour issues, but which also protects the rights of all children to an education."

An Education Department spokeswoman said all schools had to develop a behaviour code, while suspensions and exclusions were last resorts "designed to help students change their behaviour while protecting the rights of the wider school community".

"Behaviour which respects the rights of all students to learn and teachers to teach is fundamental to all students' success at school. The department's School Discipline Policy ... clearly states that schools will work together with their communities to create learning environments that are safe, inclusive, conducive to learning and free from harassment and bullying."

The Human Rights Law Centre declined to comment.

