

Inquiry into school libraries and teacher librarians in Australian schools

Recommendations

- Affirmation and clarification of the role of teacher librarian.
- Mandated guidelines for the supervision of senior students during study periods.
- Urgent update of the OASIS Library System.
- Full-time qualified teacher librarians in every school, primary and secondary.
- Adequate funding and facilities in all School Libraries, including an IWB.
- Scheduled breaks and designated administrative time for teacher librarians.
- Creation of position of District Guidance Officer to support teacher librarians.

The impact of recent policies and investments on school libraries and their activities.

I congratulate the Federal Government on its funding for school libraries. Personally, however, I have not felt the impact of this investment at all. The blinds on my library windows are broken, the carpet is threadbare, and my library budget is the lowest I've had in ten years. I have not received a teacher laptop. My library has no IWB, data projector or any digital tools by which I can demonstrate the use of ICTs.

Urgent funding is needed to update the OASIS Library System which is an outdated DOS based system. OASIS is frequently down, meaning that students are unable to borrow books or look up information on the library catalogue. There are frequent instances of "data slippage" in which, inexplicably, important information is lost. This could mean that there is no record of a recently entered resource, or a book that has been returned is still recorded under the borrower's name. This outmoded system compromises our professionalism. Please give us a Library System for the 21st Century!

The future potential of school libraries and librarians to contribute to improved educational and community outcomes, especially literacy.

There is enormous unrealised potential for teacher librarians to make a huge difference to improved educational outcomes, especially literacy. The role of the teacher librarian needs to be respected. The teacher librarian's skills should be utilised in a professional manner, allowing her/him to co-operatively plan with other teachers so that information literacy skills are integrated into programs across the Key Learning Areas. This requires the respect and support of the Principal and executive for the teacher librarian and knowledge of the role. Time also needs to be allocated for adequate preparation and administration.

At the moment, my role is chief babysitter to the many senior students who have excess study periods due to TVET courses. Some Year 12 students have only 8 units of school-based subjects. This translates to around twelve 50 minute periods per fortnight in the library, often with nothing to do. If I have a class in the library as well, I am constantly asking the seniors to stop talking so I can teach. **Supervision of senior students is a whole school responsibility and firm guidelines should be in place to ensure that these students work productively and are not just "dumped" in the school library for hours each week.**

My professionalism as a teacher librarian is constantly undermined. I have no scheduled breaks; I have to close the library and turn students away because I am needed on playground duty; when teachers are absent, often their classes are sent to the library for supervision; when I am absent I am not replaced, and senior students are still sent to the library even though the executive know that they cannot be supervised by SASS staff. When I enquired about a teacher laptop so I could assist students on their *Laptops 4 Learning*, I was told to get myself onto the timetable if I wanted to be seriously considered.

I have worked in both primary and secondary libraries, and am convinced that all primary schools, regardless of student numbers, would benefit enormously from having a full time teacher librarian with a flexible timetable.

The factors influencing recruitment and development of school librarians

The profile of the Teacher Librarian in the school has major implications for future recruitment. Unfortunately, the role often lacks the support and professional respect of the wider school community. The role often lacks clear definition and is open to abuse. There are also limited opportunities for promotion. The teacher librarian manages a budget, significant resources and staff, and yet is not classified as a Head Teacher.

Most teacher librarian training courses (for example, graduate diploma and masters degrees) qualify the teacher librarian to teach library K – 12, yet the NSW DET does not allow for secondary-trained teacher librarians to teach in primary schools, or vice versa.

More professional development is needed which is specifically designed for the teacher librarian, including on Staff Development Days when many activities lack relevance.

The role of different levels of government and local communities and other institutions in partnering with and supporting school librarians.

I congratulate the State Library of NSW for its vital role in supporting teacher librarians, staff and students of secondary schools. The opportunity to access expensive online databases is a godsend for cash-strapped school libraries, and allows academically-minded senior students the opportunity to pursue advanced research.

The DET's School Libraries & Information Literacy Unit is an invaluable source of professional support and is essential for teacher librarians to be kept abreast of current developments in their field. This unit also provides opportunities for learning, linking schools across NSW in their book raps.

My local network (the St George Teacher Librarian Network) provides opportunities for professional development and discussion with colleagues about school library issues.

The NSW Teacher Librarian Listserv provides daily support. Colleagues from around the state can share problems and solutions with one another.

One recommendation to further increase support to teacher librarians in schools would be to create a position of District Guidance Officer, as in the role created to lead, support and professionally develop school counsellors.

The various professional networks that support teacher librarians provide a life blood for individuals who can be isolated and misunderstood within their school environment. **The need for affirmation for the role of teacher librarian is ongoing and sorely needed.**

The impact and potential of digital technologies to enhance and support the roles of school libraries and librarians.

The impact of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in the role of the 21st Century school library cannot be underestimated. The role of the teacher librarian as an information specialist is paramount to students being able to successfully navigate the internet and select and utilise information effectively. The potential of digital technologies can be realised with the integration of information skills across the curriculum, collaboratively planned and taught by the teacher librarian and her/his colleagues, focussing on the use of ICTs.

School Libraries need to have adequate equipment, such as an Interactive White Board (IWB), if the teacher librarian is to successfully engage and instruct students in this digital age. Professional development in this area needs to be thorough, ongoing, and focussed on the specific needs of teacher librarians. Once again, the teacher librarian needs to be treated as a professional, and supported by the principal and executive – both financially, in the provision of a decent budget) and as a valued member of the school's learning support team.

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