

Kathy Faldt

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The Secretary of the Committee

House of Representatives
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Re: Inquiry into School Libraries and Teacher Librarians in Australian Schools

I agree absolutely with committee chair Ms Sharon Bird, MP, who stated

"Teacher librarians make a significant contribution to the school community in a number of ways, including teaching information literacy skills and providing access to information and resources to facilitate learning. The committee looks forward to hearing the views of interested stakeholders from around the country."

And I applaud the committee's action to invite interested organizations and individuals to make written submissions to the inquiry.

I am one of the first trained teacher librarians in Queensland – seconded for six months in 1970. I began my teaching career before school libraries existed in most schools. The first federal money arrived at Nashville where I purchased books with federal funds, attended out of school workshops to learn how to catalogue and provided an extracurricular library service.

Much has changed during 40 years of education in Queensland schools – and the injection of federal was a great stimulus. I commend the federal government for its Digital Revolution and also Primary libraries for the 21st century. It is an exciting time in which to be engaged in learning.

However buildings and equipment do not make either a school or school library. Professional educated qualified staff with support staff are needed to both educate our children and utilize resources for successful and engaged students.

This also applies in libraries – of all types – our National library, state libraries, council libraries, research libraries and most importantly of all – all school libraries regardless of size and location – public or private.

Qualified professional library staff are essential to maximize teacher and student potentials. Funding is also needed to provide a variety of learning opportunities – book and non book. Para professional and other support staff are also needed.

Behind the advances of technology not only are there educated and literate people, there has been access to a wealth of information in many formats.

A study completed by Edith Cowan University and published in May 2009 suggested that 50% of school libraries in Australia had to manage on less than \$10,000 a year for new materials, while teacher librarians (where they were still employed by schools), were under pressure to spend more time outside the school library. This has been my situation in recent years.

The development of literacy skills is crucial for students' future participation in the Australian economy and society. Teacher librarians are instrumental in supporting this important goal. The Australian Bureau of Statistics' report *Adult literacy and life skills survey* (ABS 4228.0, 2006), found that slightly less than half of the Australian population, approximately 7 million, failed to achieve the minimum required level or higher in prose and document literacy.

There is much research evidence that students attain higher levels of achievement when there is an adequately resourced school library staffed by a teacher librarian.

*In many Queensland schools– and **especially in Logan - Beaudesert Gold Coast Education region** we no longer have a qualified library professional in all our primary and secondary schools and this is a cause for serious concern.* In addition we have schools without books and many new 21st century primary schools are clinical in appearance and devoid of books.

It is difficult to cultivate a love of reading in these situations. We are directed to replace computers when they are FOUR years old (and dumping – smashed into landfill has happened recently of working computers). Our library cannot this year replace any books – the money allocated will do little more than maintain the outdated but working library management program.

There used to be a centralized library corporate body which generally recommended policy to state government. Since decentralization occurred there has been minimal support and standards have disappeared. Each region seems to have its own agenda as far as school library staffing is concerned. The region where I work and live places little value on library services. Many schools here no longer have a qualified teacher librarian or teacher to work full time in the school as a teaching learning partner.

Other regions are at the opposite end of that spectrum. How inequitable is that situation for the students at school?

Teacher-librarians can

- provide leadership in curriculum development and delivery;
- as the literature specialist, implement and promote reading programs throughout the school as well as individual free voluntary reading;
- develop a print and online resource collection that meets the needs of staff, students and the curriculum;
- teach information literacy skills in collaboration with classroom teachers so students can manage the information world with confidence and competence;
- fulfil the many other responsibilities of the qualified teacher-librarian. (See National Standards for Excellence in Teacher-librarianship: <http://www.asla.org.au/policy/standards.htm>)

The ability to read is a major factor in determining whether a child will succeed or fail in our education system, and later on in the workplace. We need to ensure that our children have the best beginning – a

literate start in life. The funding for literacy and numeracy with National Partnerships shows that government understands that principle – but fails to include the essential resources to engage in that learning process ie well staffed and resourced school library in every school in Australia,

The only way to achieve this is with national standards for school libraries. Learning in the 21st can be exciting engaging and challenging as more methods of communicating and learning are designed and become available. All learning tools should be available – paper film web digital or other media to support the different learning needs of each individual student and teacher.

What is the use of the Government investing millions of dollars in new library buildings if there are no new books to entice children in, and no teacher librarians to support a reading culture?

I urge you to recognise the vital role of school libraries and teacher librarians, particularly in the areas of literacy, lifelong learning, cybersafety, information literacy, and digital literacy skills. Adequate funding together with educational and professional development opportunities are essential to achieve the best educational and social outcomes for young Australians.

I acknowledge that state governments are currently responsible for resourcing school libraries. However the blossoming of school libraries occurred with the launch of federal funding in 1968/9– and they are now wilting after years of financial droughts. There is a drought at many schools in Logan school libraries with both provision of full time qualified teacher – librarians and money to purchase the necessary differentiating resources needed to engage with students and meet individual needs.

Finally I would like to commend The Honourable Ms Julia Gillard Deputy Prime Minister for including this inquiry in this period of the Education Revolution.

Kind regards

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