



Attention Julia Gillard

Re: Inquiry into school libraries and teacher librarians in Australian schools

Re: Terms of Reference

To inquire into and report on the role, adequacy and resourcing of school libraries and teacher librarians in Australia's public and private schools. Specifically, the committee should focus on:

Reference point 1: the impact of recent policies and investments on school libraries and their activities;

Policies for the improvement of library infrastructure and buildings was limited, and ignored the real issues in school libraries being:

The need for sufficient, equitable and ongoing funding for resources to enhance the curriculum.

The need to upgrade the library computer system regularly, to keep up with the ever expanding information systems and services available.

Sufficient and correct time allocated to library staff, to provide the much needed service and encouragement to children for reading enjoyment and research.

I currently hold the .2FTE, level 2 position of Library Officer at a small public school, approx 160 students. I have been in this position for the past 5 years. During my time here, no real funding has been forthcoming to this library from either the school, the P & C Association, the Department of Education or the State and/or Federal Governments.

This school library is allocated between \$1,000 to 1,500 per annum from the school budget, to purchase new library books for the students and staff to access. As the average cost of a new hardback book is approx \$36.00. This funding does not enable replacement or upgrading of sufficient resources for a school library to function properly.

As a result I tend to purchase only the special items from Macmillan or Usborne Books, to enhance the latest school priority. Or, as Big W have the best prices for children's books, but a limited range. I tend to buy the popular items from them. I have also been known, to purchase resources online with my own funds as the items requested by students and staff, are not available by any other means.

To assist with the library funding, I hold a Scholastic Bookfair at the school annually, for which I can either take commission in resources or a lesser value in funds. This enables purchasing of other resources for the library. A parent helper and I also provide Scholastic Bookclub, twice per term, as a service to the students and parents of the school. This service provides a small number of resources to the school, for either class or library use.

I have also had to resort to purchasing discards from the Western Australian State Library at a cost of 50c per book. These discards are in good condition, and provide

the much needed enhancement to items presently on hand in the school library collection. Another practice I have implemented is the purchasing of good condition second-hand books from bookshops around the metropolitan area. A lot of preparation work is required for these purchases as the books generally need cleaning and the State Library labelling has to be removed or covered. This is all done in my own time, and on numerous occasions with my own funds.

With all the previous and implemented practices, I have managed to increase the library book holdings at this school by approx 2000 items out of the 2500, new resources accessioned in the last 5 years.

As a suggested rule, another 20% of budget funds should be allocated from any library funding to the purchase of book covering materials. At this school, that amount is not forthcoming.

No funding in the Governments recent stimulus package was forthcoming to this library either. The roof leaks, and I have been told the only way to correct the situation is for it to be re-roofed, which is not currently envisioned. The building and of course the roof, would be at least 30 years old and it appears to have the original paint job. The carpet is not too bad; however it has not been cleaned in the 5 years I have been present, and is not on the cleaning roster for the near future either. The reasons given, for not cleaning it is always a cost and priority issue.

The linoleum floor, in the work area of the Library, was stripped and cleaned this holiday period for the second time in 5 years, while other floors in the school get done once per term or at least once per year. Same issue, not seen as a priority for cleaner's time and funding.

The furniture is either the original items supplied, or has been appropriated from other school or resource centre closures. Or obtained from other departments (like the Health Department) when they have been updating the décor in their main office buildings.

I believe this library does not have adequate funds provided for resourcing, maintenance and updating of the hardware or software for moving into the web. This library has sadly been neglected as I am sure others have and are.

Reference point 2: the future potential of school libraries and librarians to contribute to improved educational and community outcomes, especially literacy;

Each school Library has the potential to provide improved educational and community outcomes by addressing the issues it faces within the socio economics of the area it is situated, and for the ongoing training, of the library staff, to be provided for. Each school library needs to be provided with the correct funding for resources and not just printed matter, skilled people are a vital resource.

Each year this school has its own priorities with regard to education. This year it is literacy. With that in mind I was allocated \$1,500 for purchasing of new resources, the most I have ever had access to. However the budget to cover stationery, book covering materials and the annual maintenance fees for the library service provider etc. was cut from \$1,000 to \$700.00. As this amount is less than the annual library support maintenance fee of \$780.00, as a result I have already had to make plans to find the additional funding, by allocating some of my anticipated commission from the annual Bookfair to cover the shortfall and to provide sufficient funds for purchasing ink and book covering materials etc.

The additional time negotiated with the union and the Department of Education in WA for public school libraries late last year. Was a result of many years of requests for the correct kindy FTE allocation time, to be correctly calculated and adjusted for each public school. In the case of this school, the library FTE was adjusted by .1 to .3FTE, however the School Principal chose to use the extra .1 elsewhere.

Sufficient and correct time allocation for all library staff would and should be expected. As the public school libraries are largely manned by untrained staff, like myself, (however I have 19 years experience in a school library, the first 9 years of which was provided as a volunteer to a trained Librarian in a school library). The WA State government is pushing for libraries to be manned by volunteers. I hold serious concerns for the future of literacy in children should this eventuate. We need more skilled staff and more time allocation, not less skilled and unpaid workers. Volunteers, even though I have been one, will not always be committed and available to be on site regularly. Some volunteers will be skilled; the majority will be trying to provide the service they believe the children require to learn. The children and our future will be the losers, should this proposal eventuate.

Reference point 3: the factors influencing recruitment and development of school librarians;

In my opinion, as the Department of Education in WA does not provide for, or to is not required to have library technicians in public primary schools. Suitably trained library staff should be a priority and this situation should be addressed as a matter of importance.

Reference point 4: the role of different levels of government and local communities and other institutions in partnering with and supporting school librarians; and

As all students are, the future of our society and giving them the resources they require to achieve their potential should be our priority. The school library should be supported both financially and with all the resources required by many government departments, not just education. The P & C Associations should also be encouraged to assist school libraries enhance the literacy programs. As all students are the future, of our society. P & C Association members largely believe that the government should provide all the resources that the school requires. This belief could be changed by having them see the government is committed to enhancing school libraries and the eventual outcome would be, for better literacy skills for the children we all service.

Reference point 5: the impact and potential of digital technologies to enhance and support the roles of school libraries and librarians.

There is more and more technology being developed, which would and could provide a better support for School Libraries. Library Officers, being the people that are largely providing the library service in schools and other staff should have equitable access to this technology and the ongoing training required, to enhance the potential learning of the students. Until education funding is sufficiently and equitably dispersed to school libraries, this will not eventuate.

Recommendations: That all schools, whether public or private, primary or secondary, should have access to a range of staff, being professional Teacher Librarians, Librarians, Library Technicians and skilled Library Officers. As well as access to sufficient funding, to provide the much needed resources and services required to focus learning and curriculum development in any school through the school library.

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