

Inquiry into school libraries and teacher librarians in Australian schools



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:

- the impact of recent policies and investments on school libraries and their activities;

Recent policies regarding staffing of school libraries are a concern. Some schools have decided that the expertise of the teacher librarian is not needed and have used the funding for the position in another role within the school. I believe that if the funding is for a specialised position then the money should employ a person for that position.

I have heard that many primary school teacher librarians are used as the relief from face to face teacher in the school. This policy is a concern as it does not allow the teacher librarian to teach information skills to primary students. The importance of these skills in the information age cannot be over estimated.

The policy of some school principals to control the spending ability of teacher librarians is a concern. The budgets of school libraries are already very limited but for principals to decide what the money should be spent on without consultation is not good policy.

A policy is being implemented in some public libraries whereby a standing order of approved books is sent by a contracted publisher every quarter. They are not acquiring from a range of publishers or catering for the collection development policy of the library. It will not work in most school libraries. Our secondary school has several special collections which reflect the schools and community needs. We also buy from local bookshops who offer good deals and give bonus books when available.

The policy of buying from contracted suppliers is having a detrimental effect on the school libraries relations with the community. The procurement of televisions, CD players, video cameras and other goods from contracted suppliers is not helping the local economy or service. We can negotiate excellent deals with local suppliers because their children go to the local school. The local retailers went to the local school and would like to support their school. Procurement is an inefficient government policy.

The government investment in school libraries is to be applauded. Many schools had very old and outdated library facilities. The introduction of new technologies such as interactive white boards, video editing facilities, network printing and wireless internet connections has given libraries the ability to engage students like no era previous.

- the future potential of school libraries and librarians to contribute to improved educational and community outcomes, especially literacy;

The information age has provided a remarkable range of opportunities for school librarians to contribute to educational outcomes. The many book raps, webquests, online databases, moodles and intranet activities has been fantastic for students learning outcomes especially literacy. The future potential for school librarians is expanding

rapidly as the learning through information technology expands. The quality pedagogy that exists in school libraries arises from a quality learning environment. Their is significance to students learning through relevance to their assignments and also to their entertainment needs. School libraries allow students to relax and enjoy recess and lunchtime by reading a book or magazine.

- the factors influencing recruitment and development of school librarians;

There are a number of concerns about the introduction of Library technicians or library officers to run school libraries. The people may be competent to circulate books but working in the school library is primarily a teaching role. I believe that teacher librarians need to be employed in school libraries now more than ever as there is so many information sources to be scanned, selected and displayed.

The ongoing development of school librarians is essential for quality teaching to occur. The teacher librarian needs to be familiar with the latest software and resources. The North Coast Teacher Librarians Collegiate meet once a term and have visiting speakers and authors who conduct workshops on nominated topics

- the role of different levels of government and local communities and other institutions in partnering with and supporting school librarians;

The federal and state levels of government have funding support mostly and this is appropriate however the local government partnership with the local public libraries is beneficial for all. The supportive partnership can allow both libraries to assist users. When both libraries complement what is offered there is less duplication of services.

Community organisations support our library in a variety of ways. Firstly is financial where funds are directed to the school library by donations for special projects. We also have volunteers from organisations come once a week to read with students.

The school library has relationships with many NGOs and government agencies as a meeting place and teaching place. Department of Fisheries conduct boating courses and universities conduct seminars.

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

The impact of digital technology has been enormous but the potential is just so exciting. The students are really engaging in learning using language and thinking that shows a deep understanding. Many students are borrowing video cameras from the library and then recording information which they then edit to record a DVD. They then hand in the DVD to the teacher instead of a piece of cardboard with a big heading and few pictures stuck around some nicely typed information.

The digital technologies has allowed many school librarians to develop outstanding sites on the intranet where students can interact in many ways including reviews of books they have read or doing find a words. The potential of digital technology in the library is only limited by the imagination however I do encourage all students to borrow books. They will not be replaced by Kindle or e-book sites but it is the school librarian to can assist by recommending books or by purchasing books that the students recommend.