

Overview

...the school library is the school's physical and virtual learning commons where inquiry, thinking, imagination, discovery, and creativity are central to students' information-to-knowledge journey, and to their personal, social and cultural growth...¹

'Who was one of the people who inspired my love of reading? - my librarian at school who kept feeding me books that I wanted to read.'²

Background

- 1.1 The inquiry is a timely response to calls from the library and information management sector for a review focusing on school libraries and teacher librarians.
- 1.2 The last federal parliamentary committee inquiry into libraries was the Senate Environment, Communications, Information Technology and the Arts Reference Committee's report into Libraries in the Online Environment (June 2004). To the Committee's knowledge this is the first ever federal parliamentary inquiry into school libraries and teacher librarians.
- 1.3 The school library is one of many resourcing priorities being competed for in an environment of limited expenditure by education authorities. A 2008 joint project between Edith Cowan University, the Australian School Library Association (ASLA) and the Australian Libraries Information Association (ALIA) found that 29 per cent of schools in general (and 54

1 Center for International Scholarship in School Libraries, *Submission 163*, p. 2.

2 Mr C. Cheng, *Submission 317*, p. 1.

per cent of government schools) have an annual budget of less than \$5 000 to provide curriculum support, reading materials and electronic resources.³ According to the Children's Book Council of Australia (CBCA), many school libraries receive budgets below 1975 levels. The CBCA Library Survey (2010) found that the average school library budget of respondent schools today equates to just \$25 per child.⁴ A Softlink International survey conducted in 2010 on school library budget trends revealed that there are also inconsistencies between annual school library budgets across education providers and suggests that where student populations are similar in size, primary school libraries are generally funded one third less than secondary schools.⁵

1.4 There is a perception by many librarians that they have to constantly demonstrate their worth to principals and the wider school community in order to receive support.

1.5 Whilst research demonstrates a clear correlation between a good school library and teacher librarian and student achievement,⁶ the link is not always appreciated, acknowledged or made best use of.

1.6 A 2010 study by the National Literacy Trust and Museums and Libraries and Archives Council in the United Kingdom found that libraries in many schools in Britain were a 'wasted resource,' poorly embedded in the infrastructure of schools and absent from school development plans:

School library services could be a highly efficient way of ensuring that schools maximise their value for money by having access to the resources, information and expertise they need to develop children's reading and literacy, and offering access to knowledge.⁷

1.7 The role of school libraries all over the world is undergoing change as technology evolves and students increasingly access information from the internet and electronic media.

3 Australian School Libraries Research Project in DEEWR, *Submission 344*, p. 11.

4 Children's Book Council of Australia, *Submission 50*, p.3.

5 Softlink International, *Submission 255*, p. 5.

6 See the 2003 Lonsdale report, Michele Lonsdale, 'Impact of School Libraries on Student Achievement: A Review of the Research,' March 2003, accessed 18 February 2011 at <<http://www.asla.org.au/research/Australia-review.htm>>and others on ASLA website: <http://www.asla.org.au/research/>.

7 Literacy Trust Organisation, 'School Libraries: A Plan for Improvement,' Executive Summary, 2010, p. 4, accessed 18 February at <http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/assets/0000/5718/School_Libraries_A_Plan_for_Improvement.pdf>.

- 1.8 Here in Australia, according to ASLA, '2011 is predicted to be the year of the tablet PC.' The Committee heard that in 2010, trials of iPads as student learning tools commenced in a mix of primary and secondary schools:

In Victoria, 500 were purchased [and distributed] across eight schools [by the Victorian Department of Education]. In Tasmania there were 30 iPads across 10 schools. Queensland has 50 in two schools. In NSW it tends to be the larger private schools in Sydney who are looking at the trials.⁸

- 1.9 Following encouraging results from the trial in 2010, all 300 year 7 students at Ringwood Secondary in Victoria have iPads. Other schools, public and private, have taken a similar course.⁹ Thinking ahead to students about to enter university, it was interesting to note that this year the University of Adelaide has supplied every science student with an iPad.¹⁰
- 1.10 The role of teacher librarians, like classroom teachers, is clearly changing in an increasingly digital age and teachers must be adept at facilitating learning through the new technologies.
- 1.11 Assessing the place of school libraries and teacher librarians in the new educational landscape is important, as is a national dialogue about the future direction of school libraries and teacher librarians.
- 1.12 Despite scoring well in literacy rates, Australia is one of only five Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries in which literacy and numeracy performance has declined in the last ten years.¹¹ According to the OECD, enjoyment of reading amongst students tends to have deteriorated in all countries. Yet, in all countries, students who enjoy reading the most perform significantly better than students who enjoy reading the least.¹²

8 ASLA, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 11 February 2011, p. 9.

9 G. Barker, 'Better slate than never', *The Age*, Green Guide, 10 February 2011.

10 ASLA, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 11 February 2011, p. 9.

11 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 'PISA 2009 Results: Executive Summary,' p. 19, (2010), accessed 18 February at <<http://www.pisa.oecd.org/dataoecd/34/60/46619703.pdf>>.

12 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 'PISA 2009 Results: Executive Summary,' p. 12, (2010), accessed 18 February at <<http://www.pisa.oecd.org/dataoecd/34/60/46619703.pdf>>.

- 1.13 Australia's digital literacy rating as compared to other countries' is about to be tested in a major international project called the 21st Century Skills Initiative which will assess the 21st century learning skills of students.¹³
- 1.14 In light of the Commonwealth's investment in educational infrastructure, principally through the Building the Education Revolution (BER) initiative, it seems an especially appropriate moment for a national inquiry into school libraries and teacher librarians in Australia.
- 1.15 The BER initiative is the single largest element of the Commonwealth Government's \$42 billion nation-building economic stimulus plan, with around 24 000 projects to be delivered in every community across Australia.
- 1.16 The Primary Schools for the 21st Century component of the BER provides \$14.1 billion for all Australian primary schools, K-12 schools (primary school component) and special schools to build facilities such as libraries, multipurpose halls or classrooms, or to upgrade existing facilities. The construction of libraries was identified as a high priority.¹⁴
- 1.17 This inquiry offers a unique opportunity to bring stakeholders from government, peak bodies, and schools together to deliberate on what school libraries and teacher librarians contribute to education in Australia, as well as examine what more might be done to increase their value. Most importantly, the inquiry provides an opportunity to raise the profile and status of the contribution that teacher librarians can make to educational outcomes.

Referral of inquiry

- 1.18 On 10 March 2010 the then Minister for Education, the Hon. Julia Gillard MP, asked the Education and Training Committee of the 42nd Parliament to inquire into and report on school libraries and teacher librarians in Australian schools.
- 1.19 The inquiry lapsed with the prorogation of Parliament on 19 July 2010.
- 1.20 On 23 November 2010, the Minister for School Education, Early Childhood and Youth, The Hon. Peter Garrett MP, re-referred the inquiry to the

13 DEEWR, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 11 February 2011, p. 26.

14 DEEWR, *Submission 344*, p. 2.

Education and Employment Committee of the 43rd Parliament. The terms of reference were the same as for the previous inquiry.

- 1.21 The terms of reference for the inquiry are set out in the front pages of the report.

Parameters of inquiry

- 1.22 The Commonwealth Government provides general purpose funding to government and non-government schools alike and plays a national leadership role in facilitating agreed education outcomes between the Commonwealth Government, state and territory governments, and, through them other primary and secondary school stakeholders. However, the Commonwealth Government is not responsible for the day-to-day management of schools. In the government sector, issues of hiring, numbers, conditions and duties of staff within schools are the responsibility of state education authorities, or principals within self-managing schools. In the non-government sector those decisions tend to be very much the responsibility of the schools themselves.
- 1.23 While the Committee has been called upon to inquire into and report on the role, adequacy and resourcing of school libraries and teacher librarians in Australia's public and private schools, in the current system these allocation matters are largely ones for state and territory education authorities to determine.
- 1.24 The Committee only has the power to make recommendations to the Commonwealth Government and, as such, is limited in the recommendations it can make in this report with respect to resourcing issues.
- 1.25 That said, mechanisms exist for the Commonwealth Government to work together with the states and territories on education reforms, principally through the Council of Commonwealth Government's (COAG) Ministerial Council on Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs (MCEECDYA)¹⁵ and the biennial Australian education ministers' forum.

15 Functions of the Council include coordination of strategic policy at the national level, negotiation and development of national agreements on shared objectives and interests (including principles for Commonwealth Government/State relations) in the Council's areas of responsibility, negotiations on scope and format of national reporting on areas of responsibility, sharing of information and collaborative use of resources towards agreed objectives and priorities, and coordination of communication with, and collaboration between,

Through these mechanisms the Commonwealth and states regularly engage on matters such as the development of the national curriculum and national professional standards for teachers.

- 1.26 In addition to making recommendations to the Commonwealth Government, the Committee will distribute the report to the states and territories for their attention and reference. The Committee hopes that the report highlights the concerns raised by teacher librarians, and accentuates the significant contributions that school libraries and teacher librarians are making to learning outcomes in primary and secondary schools.

Inquiry process

- 1.27 Media releases announcing the establishment of the inquiry were issued in the 42nd and 43rd Parliaments on 18 March 2010 and 25 November 2010 respectively.
- 1.28 The inquiry was advertised in *The Australian* and on the Committee's website.
- 1.29 387 written submissions were received from a range of interested organisations and individuals, including education departments, peak bodies, unions, interest and community groups, schools and teachers. The submissions are listed in Appendix A. 24 exhibits were taken. These are listed in Appendix B.
- 1.30 The former Committee conducted 12 public hearings in each of the state and territory capitals between April and July 2010. Appendix C details the witnesses who appeared at each hearing.
- 1.31 The current Committee resolved to use submissions and evidence gathered for the inquiry into school libraries and teacher librarians in the last Parliament to develop a report and recommendations.
- 1.32 All media releases, submissions and transcripts are available for viewing and download from the Committee's website.¹⁶

related national structures (MCEECDYA's website: MCEECDYA, 'About MCEECDYA,' accessed 18 February 2009, at <<http://www.mceecdya.edu.au/mceecdya/>>).

16 House of Representatives Education and Employment Committee website, <<http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/ee/schoollibraries/index.htm>>.

Structure of report

- 1.33 The remainder of the report is structured around four of the five terms of reference for the inquiry. Chapter two focuses on the impact of recent federal government policies and investments in school libraries and their activities. Chapter three considers the future potential of school libraries and librarians to contribute to improved educational and community outcomes, especially literacy. Chapter four examines factors influencing recruitment and development of teacher librarians. Chapter five centres on the various partnerships that can support and strengthen school libraries. The last term of reference on the impact and potential of digital technologies to enhance and support the roles of school libraries and librarians is not given its own chapter because those matters are considered – to the extent to which evidence on them was provided – throughout the other chapters. Some concluding comments are offered in the final chapter, chapter six.

Definitions

School libraries

- 1.34 ALIA outlined the role of libraries:

Libraries and the library profession contribute to an informed society by acquiring, organising, archiving, retrieving, using, synthesising and analysing information thereby empowering users so that they can utilise this information in their decision making processes.

School libraries sit within the broader structure of the Australian library infrastructure. This infrastructure includes: the National Library and state libraries, university and TAFE libraries, public libraries, school libraries [of which there are approximately 9 000] and special libraries (e.g. government department, health etc). The collections from these libraries are supported by professionally produced catalogues, indexes and abstracts, a national bibliographic database (Libraries Australia), a national schools database (Schools Catalogue Information Service), digital preservation, interlibrary loan and database consortia arrangements all of which underpins world class research, creativity and innovation.

Library infrastructure includes not only physical infrastructure such as buildings, fit-outs, computer hardware, collections, but also the infrastructure for staffing, communications including digital communication, transport and service networks.¹⁷

- 1.35 ASLA's 'Statement on school libraries in Australia' describes the school library as:

a vital teaching and learning environment in the school community. The school library and its staff are integral to empowering students to become independent lifelong learners. Student learning outcomes are enhanced through the teacher librarian's acquisition and organisation of information resources, the dissemination and circulation of learning materials and collaboratively planned programs to integrate information and digital literacy.¹⁸

Teacher librarians

- 1.36 ALIA and ASLA outlined in some detail the role of teacher librarians in two documents: the 'Standards of professional excellence for teacher librarians' (see Appendix D for a copy in full); and the 'Statement on teacher librarians in Australia.'¹⁹

- 1.37 ALIA summarised what teacher librarians do:

Teacher librarians support and implement the vision of their school communities through advocating and building effective library and information services and programs that contribute to the development of lifelong learners.

The teacher librarian is both an educator and an information manager with integrated understandings from both areas. Professional staff qualified in teacher education and librarianship (teacher librarians) are responsible for both shaping and reflecting the school's objectives with respect to library and information programs and services.

As an integral partner in the school's teaching and learning team, the teacher librarian has a role in the planning, implementation

17 ALIA, *Submission 332*, p. 4.

18 ASLA, 'Statement on school libraries in Australia,' February 2009, accessed 18 February at <<http://www.asla.org.au/policy/school.libraries.Australia.htm>>.

19 See: ASLA, 'Statement on teacher librarians in Australia,' February 2009, accessed 18 February at <<http://www.asla.org.au/policy/teacher.librarians.Australia.htm>>.

and evaluation of education policies, curricula, learning outcomes and programs, with particular reference to the development of learners' research and information literacies.

The valuable role of the teacher librarian focuses on:

- learners and learning;
- teachers and teaching;
- resourcing the curriculum;
- facilitating access to the information; and
- developing the physical environment.

To achieve in these 5 areas, teacher librarians have to:

- understand learners and their needs;
- collaborate with teachers to plan and implement information literacy and literature programs;
- ensure the school library collection supports the school curriculum and community;
- use technologies as teaching and learning tools;
- create effective learning environments; and
- participate in the school and wider learning community.²⁰

- 1.38 ALIA defines a teacher librarian as someone holding recognised teaching qualifications and qualifications in librarianship, defined as eligibility for Associate (i.e. professional) membership for the Australian Library and Information Association. Within the broad fields of education and librarianship, teacher librarians are uniquely qualified. The value of teacher librarians lies in their possessing curriculum knowledge and pedagogical skills together with library and information management knowledge and skills.²¹
- 1.39 Teacher librarians may be assisted by library technicians (paraprofessional staff with specialised technical training in library systems processes and operations) and other staff without recognised qualifications who provide general clerical support. Other qualified librarians may work in some school libraries, depending on state-based school arrangements.²²
- 1.40 The ALIA/ASLA publication 'Learning for the future: developing information services in schools' complements the Standards and presents benchmarks against which schools can evaluate current provisions for developing information literacy. It provides a focal point for states,
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²⁰ ALIA, *Submission 332*, pp. 5-6.

²¹ ALIA, *Submission 332*, p.5.

²² ALIA, *Submission 332*, p. 5.

territories and schools to develop more specific and prescriptive standards, and for each school community to plan programs to develop information literacy and information services responsive to its own needs and resources.²³

- 1.41 The Queensland University of Technology Faculty of Education offers a useful summary table of the defining characteristics of excellent school libraries and teacher librarians.

Table B: Characteristics of excellent school libraries and teacher-librarians School libraries

Exemplary school libraries offer equitable access for students and teachers to:

Specialist educators to support and develop learner capacities for physical and intellectual access to information – in diverse modes and media - for the use and creation of information by learners and teachers;

Learning program support which generates a spirit of enquiry, which develops literacy across multiple media and fosters, collaborative and independent learning processes;

Evaluated collections and sources of information in multiple print, visual and digital/online modes and formats for learning and teaching;

A wide, current range of literature for children and young people, integrated into curriculum and learning programs and promoted to support both literacy and lifelong reading for pleasure;

Customised, purpose-designed learning spaces with the physical, social and digital/online dimensions to enable learners and teachers to engage in independent, collaborative and creative learning

Teacher-Librarians

Exemplary professional practice involves teacher-librarians who are:

Specialist educators with dual qualifications in both teaching and librarianship; ideally they hold an accredited post-graduate qualifications in teacher-librarianship;

Reflective practitioners informed by international research, national and local curriculum imperatives and contemporary pedagogical approaches;

Proactive and collaborative practitioners in inquiry-based learning, program design and implementation;

Leaders in literacy and literature learning programs – including digital/online experiences and literature for children and young people;

Experts in information literacy (and digital literacy), promoting critical, ethical and creative use of information (in all its forms) for learning;

Advocates for literacy learning within the communities allied to schools;

Resource and information managers concerned with the evaluation, selection, organisation and use of learning resources

Source: Queensland University of Technology Faculty of Education, Submission 30

23 ASLA and ALIA, *Learning for the future: Developing information services in schools*, Curriculum Corporation, 2002, p. 5.