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**Submission to House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training Inquiry into School Libraries**

**Public Libraries Victoria Network** is a collaborative and advocacy organisation comprised of Victorian Local Government Public Library Services.

Victoria has 45 public library services. There are 30 services operated by individual councils, 14 regional library corporations which provide services for a number of councils and the Vision Australia Information and Library service which provides services to the print-impaired.

We work with school libraries with our common aim of improving literacy for young people.

In Victoria there are several joint-use school-community libraries. There is scope for the number of these to be increased but it is essential that guidelines, especially for the governance and staffing of the facilities are developed and implemented to ensure that the arrangement operates in the best interests of the community.

We would like to make the following comments under the Terms of Reference of the Inquiry.

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

Funding to school libraries has been reduced in recent years. This has led to some primary schools not having a library at all and to increasing employment of library technicians instead of qualified librarians.

Recently there has been funding provided to build new libraries in primary schools. While the new buildings are very welcome, they are of limited use without appropriate staffing.

The lack of a career path for teacher-librarians has led to many of them pursuing their career through teaching rather than librarianship. This contributes to a lack of qualified staff working in school libraries.

School libraries are under-funded in terms of print and online resources and staffing. A guarantee of a minimum level of funding per student would help redress this.

As a result of the decline in funding to school libraries, public libraries are increasingly having to play a role in educating children in library skills as well as providing the materials for schoolwork. More formal links between public and school libraries would enable this to be done more efficiently.

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

Public libraries have the same objectives as school libraries in this regard.

The Premiers Reading Challenge, Early Years Program, Summer Reading, Books and Blokes and Inside a Dog have all been great initiatives that are contributing to literacy development. The lack of resources in school libraries makes the partnership with public libraries critical for increasing literacy levels.

There is scope for closer partnerships between school and public libraries. For example, the linking of library management systems so that school students could access public library collections through their school library would greatly improve access to resources for school students, particularly in regional Victoria. Public libraries would benefit if they had access to the high speed internet connections available to schools.

Frankston Library Service and Frankston Secondary College are in the process of setting up a joint library card and this is an idea which could be applied across Victoria.

- **Factors influencing recruitment and development of school librarians**

Public libraries, like school libraries, are experiencing an ageing workforce. There is potential for the two sectors to work together to encourage young people into the profession. Both school and public libraries are represented on the ALIA Library Careers Working Party.

In regional areas it can be difficult to attract qualified teacher-librarians. With more training in education practice and literacy there could be a role for public libraries in assisting literacy development through a funded partnership with schools.

Shared professional development, especially in literacy development would be useful. Public library staff need to know curriculum areas as well and, with the new National Curriculum, public libraries will need to change collections to match new demands. For their part, it would be useful for school librarians to learn about literacy initiatives being developed by public libraries.

Secondment of teacher-librarians to public libraries would improve their skills and knowledge.

- **The role of different levels of government and local communities and other institutions in partnering with and supporting school libraries**

The Victorian State Government has a policy of encouraging the development of joint use school-community libraries. Caroline Springs is a recent example which has been very successful. In this case the school pays the Melton Shire Council to provide its library service through the public library. The new Altona North Library is adjacent to the Bayside College Altona North campus and is planned to have a close relationship with the school.

Joint use arrangements provide many advantages for the schools. Public libraries can extend the availability of resources to students as a result of their greater budgets for materials, their longer opening hours and their proactive approach to assisting students with their education.

Location of a public library within a school works well in cases where the school is well-sited in terms of public access. As well as providing a public library facility, this arrangement also results in the school facilities being available to the community outside school hours.

Public libraries can be places for students at risk of leaving school to reconnect with the community and gain self esteem and confidence. The West Australian program Finding My Place has been very successful in connecting young people with the library as an alternative place for learning and ultimately encouraging them to return to formal education. Public libraries also provide opportunities for students to link in with other generations.

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

Digital technologies mean that an increasing proportion of public library resources are available online and remotely. This means that students can access public library resources even if the library itself is not situated close to the school.

There is scope for public and school libraries to collaborate in subscriptions to databases and to share resources.

Public libraries provide free internet access during their extensive opening hours and this is used extensively by school students.

Students depend heavily on their school library staff to train them to use the rich online resources of the public library. Qualified staff in school libraries result in better utilisation of public library online resources.

School librarians play an important role in assisting students to create content using Web 2.0 technology. It is important that students are taught appropriate online behaviour and the school library should be resourced adequately in order to do this.

There can be a tendency to believe that the provision of computers and online resources is sufficient to ensure information literacy on the part of students. In fact skilled staff in school and public libraries are essential to ensure students develop the skills they need to fulfil their potential.

### **Additional Comments**

Public Libraries Victoria Network welcomes this opportunity to comment on school libraries and suggest how they could work more effectively with public libraries.

We suggest that public libraries themselves could form the subject of a further inquiry. Public libraries throughout Australia play an important role in promoting literacy (including computer literacy), supporting education at all levels and providing a focus for communities. They have the scope to do even more but are constrained by a lack of resources.

An inquiry looking at how libraries can be utilised more effectively to further social inclusion objectives and how they can be resourced to do this is recommended.

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