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To the Committee Secretary, Australian Parliament House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training,

My name is Marissa Caluzzi and I work as a Teacher Librarian in an independent school in Melbourne. I am dedicated to ensuring that my school library is a vibrant, welcoming hub of learning for my school community. Personally, I feel very lucky to be working in a school that truly values the work of the school library, and the Teacher Librarians and support team that are employed there. In addition to class time, our school library is open before school, after school, and at lunchtimes, and is always a busy, hive of learning at those times. The students, staff, and parents have access to a well-resourced, beautiful new library (built prior to the release of the Education Building Stimulus initiative), staffed by a team of passionate and enthusiastic professionals, all aimed at meeting, and extending, the information and literature needs of our community. It provides many opportunities for the educational, cultural, and social growth of our students.

Unfortunately the same cannot be said for all school libraries, as I have observed through my interactions with other, not-so-lucky Teacher Librarians, as well as through a range of associated professional networks.

I am writing this submission because I believe all students have the right to high quality school libraries, staffed by professional **Teacher Librarians**. Teacher Librarians are qualified Teachers as well as qualified Librarians, which is an important distinction to make, as they are an active member of the teaching staff in the school, and have an excellent understanding of the educational needs of the community as a result.

I welcome this inquiry into the role, adequacy and resourcing of school libraries and teacher librarians in Australia's public and private schools.

This submission will address each of the terms of reference below:

1. The impact of recent policies and investments on school libraries and their activities;
2. The future potential of school libraries and librarians to contribute to improved educational and community outcomes, especially literacy;
3. The factors influencing recruitment and development of school librarians;
4. The role of different levels of government and local communities and other institutions in partnering with and supporting school librarians; and
5. The impact and potential of digital technologies to enhance and support the roles of school libraries and librarians.

### **1. The impact of recent policies and investments on school libraries and their activities**

It was wonderful to hear that the Federal Government's Education Building Stimulus initiative resulted in many schools receiving funds to be used towards the building of, or refurbishment of, a school library. However, there is no mention of how schools will fund the staffing, of these new buildings into the future. Whilst new facilities are welcomed, there also needs to be consideration as to how these school libraries will be staffed, in order to maximise the teaching and learning potential for our students.

*"The devolution of financial management to schools means that funding for school libraries relies on the resource allocation priorities established by the school community, which might or might not place a high priority on the need for a well-staffed library system."* (ASLA, 2004)

This means that the staffing of the school library varies from school to school, which does not seem equitable. In Victoria, I have observed a huge decline in the numbers of Teacher Librarians in schools, particularly in state primary schools over recent years. It appears that the Principal has had to make tough decisions about staff resources, and all too often, the school library, and the children of the school, are the losers in this scenario.

Using the standards developed by ASLA and the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) as a benchmark, Welch and Braybrook (2002) found that twenty per cent of schools in Victoria are staffed at a level equal to or above the recommended level and eighty per cent are below this standard, and that seventy per cent of schools in the survey operate below the recommended number of hours needed to staff school libraries. Reynolds and Carroll (2001) found that since 1983 the number of primary school libraries being staffed by qualified teacher librarians has dropped dramatically from fifty-five to thirteen per cent. They also found that twelve per cent of the school libraries in their survey are being managed by someone with no formal qualifications of any kind. (ASLA, 2004)

There is evidence to show that a strong library program that is adequately staffed, resourced and funded can lead to higher student achievement regardless of the socioeconomic or educational levels of the adults in the community. (Lonsdale, 2003)

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

**AND**

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

The school library, together with the Teacher Librarian, can provide an abundance of opportunities for students to develop their literacy skills. The term ‘Literacy’ encompasses so much more in today’s world, as it has evolved to incorporate new technologies. Traditionally it has referred to the ability to read and write, but the definition has been expanded and *“many now consider literacy to be the ability to locate, evaluate, use, and communicate using a wide range of resources including text, visual, audio, and video sources.”* (Virtual Information Inquiry, 2009)

Information about the world comes to our students not only through words printed on paper or a screen, but also through the powerful images and sounds of our multimedia culture. The students of the 21<sup>st</sup> century have grown up in an information rich environment and they have easy access to vast amounts of information via the technology available to them. Whilst these students may have easy access to this information, it is important that they develop the skills that will allow them to locate relevant, accurate, and easily understood information. We all know how easy it is to perform a simple online search, however actually finding information that is appropriate for the student’s reading level, as well as reliable, can often be a major challenge! Understanding the principles of copyright and the importance of citing resources is also critical for information literacy, so that our students do not succumb to a copy and paste mentality. Cybersafety is another key focus for the teaching of information literacy, as Teacher Librarians work to ensure that students learn to make good decisions about their online behaviours, thus avoiding the potential dangers of the virtual world.

This is where the information specialist, the Teacher Librarian, can have a huge impact on students. *“TLs are the gatekeepers and mediators through which children discover the different and amazing worlds at their fingertips.”* (Brooks, 2010)

I believe that the National Curriculum should address the teaching of information literacy by qualified information and teaching specialists, that is, Teacher Librarians. The teaching of information and digital literacy skills aims to ensure our students develop the range of skills they will need to become effective and discriminatory navigators of information into the future.

In these same places [school libraries], students are taught to think critically about the information they find, whether it has been uncovered from a book or cyberspace, and to utilise it in meaningful ways in the classroom and beyond. It is in the library, with TLs to guide them, that young people often begin that life-long learning journey, understanding that it doesn't stop and start within the school wall.(Brooks, 2010)

With this goal in mind, Teacher Librarians aim to ensure students and staff develop excellent information literacy and technological skills and often take on the following responsibilities in their school communities:

They:

- Provide expertise and demonstrated knowledge of, and experience with, a range of resources, including print, electronic, multimedia and the selection and suitability of such resources.
- Display leadership in the development of Web2.0 technologies and new directions in the way information is accessed and shared, including the promotion of Cybersafe behaviours.
- Take responsibility for the cataloguing of resources into the Library management system, ensuring the collection is easily accessible by the school community.
- Through their daily use of personal computers, and a range of multimedia equipment and software, they have well developed ICT skills, and provide support and guidance to students, staff, and parents.
- Team with IT staff to ensure the school network, and the School Library online interface, operates in well-organised, reliable, and user-friendly way.
- Collaboratively plan teaching and learning experiences that promote the development of student and staff Information and Communication Technology skills.
- Run Professional Development sessions for colleagues, and present a range of Information sessions for parents and the general school community.
- Provide advice to staff and students regarding issues such as copyright and intellectual property obligations.
- Provide leadership and training opportunities for students through Monitor programs.
- Aim to provide of a range of high quality, relevant, vibrant, and current resources, both electronic and print.
- Apply their experience in collection development and maintenance, ensuring the library collection development provides a wealth of resources reflecting the curriculum and beyond.
- Ensure effective management of the school library, catering particularly for the information needs of the students, staff, and parents.

The school library also plays a huge role in the fostering a love of reading in students. The school library “*plays a critical role by providing children with books and resources so that they can improve their reading skills and achieve at high levels.*” (Spelling, 2006) Teacher Librarians are often pivotal in the development of a strong reading culture in their schools.

It is through the school librarians and TLs that children are often introduced to a story that captures their imagination and inspires them to become part of a reading culture. Libraries stoke the fires of the imagination by providing the materials needed to keep it burning. They also provide a safe and happy space within which to undertake these adventures of the mind. (Brooks, 2010)

Teacher Librarians show a passion for the promotion of children’s literature, and encourage students and staff to read for pleasure in a variety of ways.

They:

- Share their knowledge of children’s literature, and fiction for youth/young adults, with students, staff, and families.
- Maintain and extend this knowledge through avid reading from the collection, as well as ensuring an awareness of new releases and reviews through a range of professional journals, and regular professional development experiences.
- Collaborate with teams of teaching staff to plan, teach and evaluate curriculum, to ensure the effective integration of literature appreciation into student learning.
- Regularly organise and manage whole school Literature events, such as Book Week celebrations, guest Author visits, Writers’ days, Book Fairs, and other School Library celebrations.
- Coordinate and manage promotional reading programs such as, the *Premier’s Reading Challenge*, involving students from Years P- 10 and the *MS Readathon* for the whole school community, and other reading incentive programs such as *Readers’ Cup*.
- Show clear thinking and judgements about the suitability of resources for the Library collection.
- Liaise with staff and student regarding selection of materials for the entire school collection.
- Ensure effective management of the school library, catering particularly for the literature needs of the students, staff, and parents.

Children become better readers (and spellers and writers) by reading. Teacher librarians are specialists in encouraging literacy through free voluntary reading, a guaranteed way to help kids become more literate. . . . Reading for pleasure provides a great deal that these tests don’t measure. Study after study has confirmed that those who read more know more. Their vocabulary increases and grammar and spelling improves (Krashen, 1993).

#### **4. The factors influencing recruitment and development of school librarians**

Currently, there appears to be limited prospects for employment, as many schools have made the decision not to have a Teacher Librarian, usually due to the rationalisation of funding. Gaining the appropriate qualifications to be a Teacher Librarian, not just a Librarian working in a school library, can be a challenge for people as well, as there are limited courses available that cater for Teacher Librarians. My own personal experience saw me build upon my earlier teaching degree and enrol in a Graduate Diploma of Information Management, followed by a Masters of Business Information Technology. Living in Melbourne, and wanting opportunities to have face to face interactions with my student peers and my lecturers, there were very limited options available to me. This must have an impact on the numbers of people undertaking qualifications in this area.

#### **5. The role of different levels of government and local communities and other institutions in partnering with and supporting school librarians**

As school libraries, and Teacher Librarians, play such an important role in the teaching and learning of our students, they should be seen as fundamental to all schools. The Federal Government can ensure that the role of school libraries, and Teacher Librarians, are included in the national curriculum. By addressing this in the national curriculum, this will ensure equity for students Australia wide. Funding for university courses for Teacher Librarians is also important, as the population is ageing and there will be limited numbers of newly qualified Teacher Librarians if this not addressed. Here are more points to consider when considering the role of governments, communities, and other institutions to support Teacher Librarians:

- Good educational planning relies on good data. We have no complete national workforce data on teacher librarian numbers and use. We have no government school data on school library budgets.
- Educational leaders need easy access to the research on the contribution of school libraries and teacher librarians to improved educational outcomes.
- Educational leaders need support in developing excellent school libraries and excellent teacher librarians (PD in use of Standards for Excellence, IL Standards, Library Standards).
- Quality teachers and pre-service teachers need easy access to the research on guided inquiry, information literacy, collaborative planning and teaching with teacher librarians.

- We have no current national government standards for school libraries to guide their development. Historically they did exist. (*Books and Beyond: Guidelines for library resource facilities and services*. Canberra: Schools Commission, 1977, 2nd ed. 1979)
- State DET support services virtually no longer exist in terms of consultancy services. Some curriculum support services remain. Professional associations have had to assume the majority of professional development, yet dependent on volunteers, this is dwindling. Newly appointed untrained school library staff are often dependent on local teacher librarian networks for their training.
- A big push was made in the 1970s to develop secondary school libraries. A similar push was never carried out fully for primary libraries.
- Common policies for school libraries and information literacy are needed across all states.

**Things the Federal government can do to support the work of Teacher Librarians and Australian school libraries:**

- collect national data on school library staffing, funding, and scheduling;
- tie funding so that states can and must adequately staff and fund school library programs and services;
- require that literacy programs and other national curricula should explicitly recognize the central role school libraries have in student achievement, literacy attainment, and preparation for post-secondary success;
- develop national school library standards;
- increase teacher librarian training positions in university programs;
- develop and publish a national information literacy curriculum;
- provide research funding on the effect of school library programs and teacher librarians on literacy and learning;
- provide grants for improving literacy through school libraries;
- facilitate national licensing of online databases for school libraries;
- declare a [national school library day](#);
- and a National Information Literacy Awareness Month.

In conclusion, if we are to improve literacy and learning for all Australian students, all school communities need a qualified Teacher Librarian. Remember, a Teacher librarian is a Teacher and a Librarian. School communities should be able to provide equitable access for all students to books, information, information technology, and qualified staff. Equitable school library budgets need to be able to provide this access.

Also, I believe that this Committee should keep the UNESCO/IFLA School Library Manifesto (outlined below) in mind as they make their decisions about the future of school libraries in Australia.

The UNESCO/IFLA School Library Manifesto believes that the school library provides information and ideas that are fundamental to functioning successfully in today's information and knowledge-based society. The school library equips students with life-long learning skills and develops the imagination, enabling them to live as responsible citizens

The Mission of the School Library:

- The school library offers learning services, books and resources that enable all members of the school community to become critical thinkers and effective users of information in all formats and media. School Libraries link to the wider library and information network in accord with the principles in the UNESCO Public Library Manifesto.
- The school library is essential to every long-term strategy for literacy, education, information provision and economic, social and cultural development. As the responsibility of local, regional and national authorities, it must be supported by specific legislation and policies. School Libraries must have adequate and sustained funding for trained staff, materials, technologies and facilities. They must be free of charge.
- The school library is integral to the educational process.
- The school library fulfils these functions by developing policies and services, selecting and acquiring resources, providing physical and intellectual access to appropriate sources of information, providing instructional facilities, and employing trained staff.
- The school librarian is the professionally qualified staff member responsible for planning and managing the school library, supported by as adequate staffing as possible, working together with all members of the school community, and liaising with the public library and others.
- To ensure effective and accountable operations. (UNESCO).

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you require any further information, or clarification, regarding this submission.

Yours sincerely,

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*AALIA*

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