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President CPPA (WA)



The Committee Secretary
House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Inquiry into School Libraries and Teacher librarians in Australian Schools

Dear Committee Members,

On behalf of the Catholic Primary Principals' Association of WA (CPPAWA), I offer this submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training Inquiry.

By way of contextualizing our submission, the CPPAWA is representative of nearly 130 Catholic Primary Principals throughout the state of Western Australia. Our membership takes in principals working in remote Aboriginal communities, rural, and city schools. The population of the schools is as low as 10 through to over 700 enrolled students. Our principals work in a broad range of culturally, economically, physical, and socially diverse school environments.

Our members were surveyed and the responses to the terms of reference received. These have been included as a synthesis of those responses, of which 72 principals or their school based representatives, contributed to the submission.

I wish to on behalf of the membership of the Catholic Primary Principals' Association of WA thank the Committee for allowing the opportunity to make our thoughts known to this Inquiry, and to wish the Standing Committee every success in their work.

Yours sincerely,

David Barns
CPPA President 2010



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

Of the schools where recent investments had already occurred it was noted that the impact within schools was already evident, with improved user friendliness, overall size, improved link to Information & Technology resources, a renewed emphasis on literacy and research skills, and a provision of an inspiring learning area for both staff and students all being commented upon. The 2001 Federation Grants Policy for school libraries to buy Australian books was noted by several respondents.

A number of those who responded did so by indicating that, as the school had only recently completed building a library, or was in the midst of such a project, it was too early to make comment on at this point in time.

The funding of new school library facilities did highlight the perceived lack of adequate library staffing within primary schools

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

Overall a positive response was given to the question about the future potential of the school library and librarians to contribute to the improved educational and community outcomes, especially in literacy.

The advent of new facilities was valued as being able to enhance the achievement of outcomes and the library seen as a valuable cog in the whole literacy learning process. With the recent capital investment into schools, this has enabled a redirecting of school funds to the purchasing of other resources throughout the school.

The teacher librarian in primary schools has always been viewed as a member of the teaching staff who contributes positively to the literacy and numeracy learning outcomes of our students. They are essential to the reading process, especially when it comes to teaching children to read for pleasure, and developing researching skills. Having a centralised resource area improves the opportunities to continue research, reading, entertainment and discussion.

Parents and community members to have access to the resources and to make use of the area; along with its display areas, was a future potential opportunity for the facilities. At different local levels this could involve longer hours of operation for students and members of the public to make use of the facilities, and the possibility to house a community literacy support centre. The supply of new technologies to support the achieving of these goals was seen as being very important



A number of our members responded that already in their own school environments no teacher librarian was employed as there was already limited funding available to support the position of a teacher librarian or library technician within the primary school setting. Additionally it was noted that at such a crucial age for the development of reading attitudes, this was one area requiring remediation.

In summary there was a positive view held by the majority of respondents about the future (and current) potential for our libraries and for the position of librarian to contribute to the improved education outcomes in primary schools. The role is clearly seen to be instrumental in the development of a love of literature, and the acquisition of research skills. The ongoing inclusion of Information Technology as an integral resource in the school library should be noted.

3. The factors influencing recruitment and development of teacher librarians.

Responses to this term of reference fell into three broad categories:

1. The lack of training and difficulties in recruiting Teacher Librarians.
2. The development and broadening of the role to include information technologies and other learning areas; and,
3. A wide range of personal and professional qualities that are required

Lack of training and difficulties in recruiting Teacher Librarians

Overall there seems to be a lack of trained teacher librarians, this given in several cases as a pivotal reason why the way the library was used had changed. Distinct lack of availability of suitably qualified candidates to fill the positions available was a common concern. At the time of recruiting a teacher librarian, many schools discover a shortage of well trained and qualified applicants for the position. Some have chosen to appoint teachers who require additional training as there appears to be little or no training for people in this area.

Development and broadening of the role

The teacher librarian still holds a key role in promoting literacy and the enjoyment of reading and to assist with inquiry skills. There needs to be a much wider brief for the library especially with the integration of digital technologies. A teacher librarian requires the skills to integrate the use of technology into their program, but most importantly have the skills to teach across the year levels from Kindergarten to Year 6.

The teacher librarian must have a strong understanding and knowledge of children's literature, be organised, have a love of literature, be IT savvy with the use of technology as a learning and discovery tool, possess excellent teaching skills, and be culturally sensitive. First and foremost the teacher librarian must be an excellent teacher.



Personal and professional qualities

In addition to what has been stated above the teacher librarian should hold the appropriate qualifications to work within a primary school setting. An effective teacher needs to be able to teach to the wide variety of classes and to the diversity of needs within each class. Training in library management is important, and the ability to use ICT skills and knowledge were both common responses received. A large number of other responses were generic qualities one would associate with many positions vacant (people skills, communication, team player).

4. The role of different levels of government and local communities and other institutions in partnering with and supporting your school librarians.

It is the firm belief of our members that support from governments, local community and other institutions is always welcome, and indeed very necessary. In some communities, but not necessarily one model fitting all, libraries could be merged with the community library and allow community access to school libraries or school increasing the use of community facilities. This would allow funds to be more effectively used especially to directly target literacy and numeracy teaching and learning. Alternatively there is broad support from our members for more active partnerships between the primary schools and public libraries. Greater opportunity to access local government resources and support through the use of these community resources and facilities was advantageous, and vice versa with the opening up of school libraries to the wider community for community involvement (e.g. aged learning)

The position (of teacher librarian) needs to be funded, but equally, due consideration to that of a funded library technician in primary schools should be given. Additionally accessibility and enhancement of global communications is a vital role of governments in school based literacy and communications advancements. Teacher librarians, (as well as all teaching staff and assistants), need support for regular in-servicing and up-skilling especially in areas within the technologies domain.

In summary, Government support (at all levels) is seen as being vital for the continuation of support for the role of teacher librarian. This support should be for adequate staffing levels, physical resourcing of, and professional development made available to. The opportunities for partnering, especially at local government level between schools and community is broadly supported by our Members.



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

Very important, and a positive impact in that the role of the librarian and the library will be further enhanced by the use of digital technologies. However this is an area that is not as advanced in our libraries as it needs to be at this point in time. The impact of digital technologies is significant in enhancing student performance and support for the teacher librarian is therefore required. This becomes a matter of having the funds provided in order for personnel to keep up with the technology available in the digital era. Schools will be required to have the resources for the teacher to be able to achieve the best outcomes for the children.

Digital technologies to date have impacted the role of the librarian and the way that they teach in schools. This requires training and professional development to ensure that along with the knowledge developed, and the various skills acquired, digital technologies support and enhance the current role of libraries and teacher librarians in written and digital literacy. The potential is very high and it is hoped that the school can provide up to date technology and training for staff in order for them to deliver a comprehensive curriculum.

With digital technology there is a greater trend to use online resources for research and fact finding for both students and for school staff. We have barely scratched the surface of the potential of this pathway to influence positively the learning outcomes of students. Further the rate of change will be exponential. This implies that a managed growth policy is essential if the full benefit is to be derived. It is expected that we as professionals keep up to date in this field.

The impact of digital technologies in this area is simply put, enormous.