

14 April 2010

Ms Julia Gillard,
C/o The Committee Secretary
Standing Committee on Education and Training
PO Box 6021
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Ms Gillard,

Inquiry into school libraries and teacher librarians in Australian public and private schools

I am writing to express my concern at the decline in numbers of teacher-librarians in schools and the decreased priority given to libraries as a valuable educational resource. I write as a concerned parent of two adolescents and as a published author of children's books.

The teacher-librarian at my children's public primary school retired in 2003 and the principal employed a part-time library technician to take her place. When questioned about this change, the principal replied that the school did not have the resources for teachers in all speciality areas and it had been decided that funding will go towards a specialist physical education teacher. At the private secondary college my children now attend, the teacher-librarian resigned at the end of 2009 and has not yet been replaced. When I questioned the headmaster, he informed me that he was looking into the current structure of the library and was unsure whether the position would continue.

Although many schools who have no teacher-librarian attempt to staff their library with library technicians, school support officers, by encouraging classroom teachers to take their own library classes or by parent and student volunteers, the depth of literacy and literature knowledge that comes from a teacher-librarian is not a skill that untrained members of staff possess. Teacher-librarians know about books and their value in the development of students' literacy, social and philosophical growth. This knowledge is just as important to students as knowledge in other specialist fields if we want young Australians to be resilient life-long learners that are valuable community members.

Education should not be an either/or situation. The sacrifice of one specialist area for another is not best practice. The Commonwealth must ensure that our students have a well-rounded education in order to compete and flourish in a global arena. Please consider mandatory funding to maintain our Australian school libraries and harness the expertise of our teacher-librarians.

Yours sincerely,

Pam Harvey