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Brief Summary of this submission to the Inquiry into School Libraries and Teacher /
Librarians in Australian Schools

Recent investments on new school Library buildings shows that the Federal government values the place of Libraries within schools. This is commendable and a positive first step in a long term commitment to improve library access for all school students.

School libraries have an important role in the future of their school communities. The existing collections are worth a lot of money, the Teacher/Librarians skills are worth so much more. Teacher/Librarians have a wealth of knowledge of literature, both current and historical. They are aware of reading trends, they know which authors will entice readers, they know where to source material for staff and parents. They are ideally placed to extend the literacy outcomes being taught in the classrooms.

A qualified Teacher/Librarian brings many specialist skills to a school. Sadly many schools are staffed by teachers who are not qualified, sometimes because that is the cheaper option taken by Principals or because they do not value the position of the Teacher/Librarian. A national set of guidelines needs to be established for Principals.

School committees (Parents and Citizens, School Canteen, School Council) are always there supporting the Teacher/Librarian. They willingly raise funds for resources and equipment to make libraries enriching, creative spaces for their children. Without these extra funds schools would have even more disparity between them.

Both Federal and State Governments have provided funds for libraries at various times but it is never on a regular basis and it is not evenly spread over the student population. The funds are usually in tied grants or schemes that have a time frame.

This submission is based on experiences gained working as a teacher, then as a Teacher / Librarian in NSW and South Australian public schools, NSW Catholic school Libraries and as a volunteer in Canadian and Channel Island libraries. I am currently working as a Teacher / Librarian at a NSW primary school.

Impact of recent policies and investments on school libraries and their activities : The Federal Government has shown that it values school libraries by implementing the recent library building program. That is a positive step in providing students and staff with an improved learning environment.

However it is not enough to provide the building. Funding for resources and qualified Teacher/Librarian positions still needs to be addressed. Resources (both print and electronic) are expensive, as are covering materials, furniture, Teacher / Librarians time in training volunteer help, professional development for new technologies and Library related matters. The employment of qualified Teacher / Librarians needs to come from the Federal Government with State Government endorsement.

The future potential of school libraries and Teacher / Librarians to contribute to improved educational and community outcomes, especially literacy:

School libraries have always had an important role to play in their school community. This can only increase with advances in publishing, (especially in Australian picture books) in technology and in the increasing value of the Library collections. Library collections are built up over many years. Their value to a school is almost immeasurable.

It can't be stressed enough that one of the Teacher / Librarians main roles is that of a teacher, specifically that of teaching the information skills process to students from as young as year 1 to high school years. Students are taught, then challenged, to locate information from any media source. This specifically aims at improving educational outcomes over a range of Key Learning Areas.

Teacher/Librarians have a wealth of knowledge of literature, both current and historical. They are aware of reading trends, they know which authors will entice readers, they know where to source material for staff and parents. By providing a stimulating reading collection and promoting it, Teacher / Librarians build on the foundations already laid in the classrooms. The Library collection adds to the literacy program in the school.

Factors influencing recruitment and the development of school librarians :

It is unfortunate that there is a huge disparity in how primary school libraries are staffed. I have heard the comment that anyone can run a Library. You may have submissions telling you this. But it is not the case. The organizational side of purchasing and payments is only a very small part of the position. A qualified Teacher/Librarian brings many specialist skills to a school. A deep rooted knowledge of literature and of the information skills process is crucial to working in a school Library. So are excellent teaching skills, co-operative planning techniques, the ability to negotiate with staff and the effective administration of funding.

Many school libraries are staffed by teachers who have no training or hands on experience in Library teaching and administration. Some have been employed by the Principal because their wages are cheaper than a qualified Teacher/Librarian. Cost cutting is the Principals prerogative, but is it in the best interests of the school?

Once, a teacher wanting to become a Teacher/Librarian was encouraged to work in all grades, K – 6 before taking on a library position. Recruitment on this basis would mean Teacher/Librarians would be familiar with student learning outcomes. They would therefore be able to plan and teach to a high standard within the Library. The school would be getting a professional, working to a high standard. If the Federal and State governments are truly committed to excellence in Education then employing qualified Teacher/Librarians is essential.

Current professional development of Teacher/Librarians is very limited. In some areas it is organised after hours. Many Teacher/Librarians are unable to attend in school time due to Relief from Face to Face commitments, especially in primary schools. Peer support should be available for every teacher. Relief from Face to Face has no formalised policy. Some Teacher / Librarians have a full load, others have very little.

Best practice shows that learning is more effective when the class teacher is also present working on a planned unit of work. Perhaps national guidelines need to be written for Principals? They are very busy administrators in their own right. Schools need positive practices that support Teacher/Librarians for the benefit of all students and staff. Currently there is little continuity between schools or regions.

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

Parents and Citizens organizations have been wonderful supporters of every school library I have ever worked in. They have been willing to raise funds for resources and equipment to make libraries enriching, creative spaces for their children. I cannot praise them enough for the work they do. Parents also volunteer to work in school libraries, doing a wide variety of tasks that Library aides would do if they were employed. Community groups like the Lions Club, RSL , Red Cross and Country Women's Association also donate resources from time to time.

Both Federal and State Governments have provided funds for libraries at various times but it is never on a regular basis and it is not evenly spread over the student population. The funds are usually in tied grants or schemes that are based on a specific time frame. By providing a specific annual amount per student (at both government and private schools) the Federal Government could allow for a fairer monetary allocation. Currently funds differ according to where the school is and the type of school that it is.

Often the huge disparity between schools is dependent on the importance the Principal places on the Library. For example, I worked at a two teacher school where the annual Library budget was \$4,500 for 25 students. At the same time I worked two days a week at an eight teacher school where the Library budget was halved to \$3,000 for 210 students when the new Principal arrived. Where was the equality? With the ever escalating cost of resources more money, not less, needs to be put into school libraries.

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

Digital technologies like the smart board have revolutionized the way a specific Library skill can be taught to students. An example of this is in the younger grades where a class of year one or two students can learn about the Library catalogue together, then explore how to use it. The future is bright with possibilities.

Thankyou for considering this submission,

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Teacher/Librarian