



Inquiry into school libraries and teacher librarians in Australian schools

Submission on behalf of:

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Summary of submission

Huge inequities in funding and staffing of school libraries exist and are increasing over time. These inequities occur between government and private sectors and between high school and primary school sectors.

Teacher Librarians play a vital role in schools, providing explicit teaching of information skills, promoting the development of a literate society, providing a cross curriculum focus to learning and managing and administering valuable learning resources.

Submission related to Terms of Reference of inquiry:

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

Federally funded investments in school library buildings under the **Building Education Revolution** occurred only in government primary schools and private schools. This has widened the gulf between government high school libraries and private school libraries catering for high school students. One only has to visit private schools such as Shore in Sydney to see this huge gap – one school library is very large, staffed by a team of teacher librarians and technical support staff, has a very large print and digital collection, leather lounges, Australian native timber 'boardroom like' tables to say nothing of the sweeping views of Sydney Harbour viewed through ceiling to floor glass windows. A visit to a 'typical' government high school library servicing up to 1200 students would reveal staffing of one Teacher Librarian, some support staff time (which is at the mercy of the school Principal), a modest print collection, limited access to digital resources due to the high cost of these subscriptions, plastic, laminex and vinyl furniture and views of the playground

through what are often poorly designed windows. Federal funding of private schools combined with BER funding has heightened these inequities.

While funding under the BER for new library buildings was welcomed by many government primary schools, the issue of staffing these libraries remains contentious. NSW DET has a formula for the allocation of Teacher Librarian time in primary schools according to student numbers. High schools of 300 students receive a 5 day per week Teacher Librarian. This is not the case for primary schools of a similar size. Also the allocation of support staff in all NSW DET school libraries is at the Principal's discretion. This creates huge inequities between schools.

The recent **NSW DET trial of the devolution of funding** to schools has led to some schools forgoing the position of a Teacher Librarian in their schools in order to fund other priorities. The difference between a school library with a trained Teacher Librarian and one without a trained Teacher Librarian is the same as the difference between a house and a home – the library can function on a very basic level but no learning will occur within its walls.

I can vouch for this from my experience having arrived at my current school following years of the past Teacher Librarian being on extended sick leave and having been replaced by casual teaching staff. The support staff had tried to keep the library running but there was very little happening in terms of collection development, there was no explicit teaching of information skills, no co-operative planning and teaching with staff across KLAs, no promotion of literacy, and the library was hardly used by staff or students. It was not a learning space.

The NSW DET Wireless rollout as an adjunct to the Federal Government's Digital Education Revolution has recognised the importance of high school libraries to the learning environment of students. Each high school library has been provided with two wireless access points allowing 60 students to access digital resources within the library from their laptops. Teacher Librarians are now able to provide a more equitable and timely access to resources.

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

Teacher Librarians in NSW government schools typically are at the forefront of the use of digital technologies for teaching and learning. Many are the Computer Co-ordinators within their schools and many libraries are the site for school's network hubs. Teacher Librarians have traditionally been early adopters of technology and are the recipients of many awards for websites, blogs, etc. Because of this willingness to embrace digital technologies, school libraries and teacher librarians are already some of the most relevant aspects of schooling to current generations of students and they will continue to be so.