



Association of Parents and Friends of A.C.T Schools Inc

The Association of P&F's of ACT Schools Representing the Interests of ACT Non-Government School Parents

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

Dear Sir/Madam

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input into the Inquiry into School Libraries and Teacher Librarians in Australian Schools.

By way of background, the Association of Parents and Friends of ACT Schools Inc (APFACTS) is an organisation which represents the interests of the parent bodies of the 44 non-government schools in the ACT. These schools have over 25,000 students enrolled and make up over 43% of the Territory's enrolments. APFACTS is affiliated with the Australian Parents Council.

There is no doubt that there will be many and varied issues that will be put to The Inquiry but this submission limits itself to the issues that most affect parents, and through them, their children. These issues fall into 5 main themes.

Lack of recognition and valuing of the role of the Teacher Librarian

A library is much more than a collection of books and other resources. Without the qualified Teacher Librarian, the value of these resources is severely reduced. Teacher Librarians have dual qualifications – in teaching and in librarianship – and have skills covering management, the information sciences and in the curriculum. They are ideally positioned to teach students how best to use the information that bombards them and to be critical and analytical in their thinking. Of course, the opportunity to contribute to improving numeracy and literacy skills is at their fingertips. .

Anecdotal evidence suggests that schools are increasingly cutting the number of qualified Teacher Librarian positions and replacing them with unqualified staff and volunteers. We can only assume this is a funding based decision. We believe this to be a false economy and

believe that research would support this assessment. A core priority for parents is that our children are taught how to learn, as well as what to learn.

In fact, Teacher Librarians are probably best placed to develop the skills in working with the ever increasing amounts and types of information that we now all face. There is a huge amount of information available in print (hard copy) and increasingly in soft copy, and any number of new sources of commentary, blogs, web pages, on-line indexes, data bases, and other e-resources etc. But not all of these sources are equal and students (and adults) will increasingly need help in being able to use these resources effectively.

It has been said that skill at searching is now a form of literacy in itself. The best people to help people develop those critical skills are librarians who know the value of various types of information, and how to best access them.

APFACTS believes, therefore, that there is an increasing need for Teacher Librarians. Rather than doing away with librarians, schools should be making more use of librarians' skills in educating students, teachers and parents as to how to make effective and efficient use of the vast amount of information they can access.

Providing support to families, particularly those from low SES backgrounds.

Research shows that a library program that is well funded - appropriately staffed and resourced – contributes to higher student achievement. This is particularly important to recognize in today's economic environment, which sees the gap between the 'haves' and the 'have not's' increasing, and where there is a clear link between student outcomes and the socio-economic status of their families. Continued, quality, access to these resources and facilities is crucially important for families.

Parents also value the person centered approach to learning that Teacher Librarians are able to provide.

Concerns for the workforce.

APFACTS has two areas of concern in regard to the nature of the Teacher Librarian workforce. The first is the trend towards a 'greying' of the workforce where the average age of the workforce is increasing, and the number of new entrants to the sector is decreasing. An urgent, robust campaign to attract more graduates into the system is required.

The second area of concern is the trend towards subsuming the roles formerly held by a Teacher Librarian and replacing them with specialist ICT staff. Whilst knowledge and understanding of emerging ICT is crucially important to the teaching and learning of students, it should not be at the expense of the range of experiences that can only be achieved through exposure to other forms of information such as the print media.

The need to work in partnership to improve cyber-safety

Parents are genuinely concerned about issues of cyber safety and their children. We believe that schools and parents need to work closely to address this issue. In the school setting, Teacher Librarians are arguably in the best position to provide this support.

Role of the School Library in the wider community

The informal role of the library as a communications hub cannot be underestimated. In many schools, this is where Teachers, parents, students and members of the wider community gather to engage in some of the less formal aspects of education. Libraries are used to display students' work, promote external educational activities (such as the MS Readathon), support community awareness events etc. For many children, libraries provide a safe place where they can relax and retreat from the stresses of formal classes or the busy playground.

As a condition of funding under the Building the Education Revolution, schools are required to ensure that new and existing libraries are made available to the general public, to the maximum extent possible. This will serve to strengthen the notion of the library as the community hub and will contribute to lifelong learning.

I hope the above comments contribute to your understanding of the priorities, as seen by parents of non-government schools in the ACT, in relation to the role, adequacy and resourcing of school libraries and Teacher Librarians in Australian Schools. Should there be any aspect that requires clarification, please do not hesitate to contact me using the above details.

Yours sincerely

Kate Lyttle
Executive Officer