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The Secretary,
Standing Committee on Education and Training
House of Representatives
Parliament of Australia

Dear Sir/Madam,

RE: Inquiry into school libraries and teacher librarians in Australian schools

The Australian Society of Authors is the principal advocate for and guardian of the professional and artistic interests of Australia's authors. Our role is to protect basic rights to freedom of expression, work to improve income and conditions, and promote Australian writing and literary culture. Towards these ends, our interest in the health of Australia's school libraries and their roles within education systems is fundamental. Australia needs the words and works of its authors to be both held in and taught in the nation's schools. This is not happening nearly enough or well enough. As the key information site in schools, libraries are under-resourced in material and in human terms.

In response to the Inquiry's terms of reference, the ASA argues that the facts are already largely known and speak for themselves:

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

By any realistic measure, the impact of these has been small, as the results of the jointly sponsored [Australian School Library Survey Project](#) undertaken in 2007 show:

50% of Australian school libraries surveyed are operating on an annual materials budget of under \$10,000 per year, while teacher librarians are under pressure to spend more and more time outside the school library.

50% of government schools have budgets of under \$5000, while three quarters of Anglican school libraries have budgets over \$20,000 (with some 10% over \$100,000).

At the same time, many new Building Education Revolution libraries will have no qualified teacher librarian and no new books. The Digital Revolution has funded much needed IT, but school library resource budgets have been left to languish.

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

The evidence from research is not in dispute. Children become better readers (and spellers and writers) by reading. Teacher librarians are specialists in encouraging literacy through free voluntary reading, a very effective way to help kids become more literate (Krashen S. *The Power of Reading*, 2004). Over 60 studies have shown that free voluntary reading is at least as conducive as conventional teaching methods in helping children to do well on standardised tests. Reading for pleasure provides a great deal that these tests don't measure. Study after study has confirmed that those who read more know more. Their vocabulary increases and grammar and spelling improves (Krashen).

As life-long learners, students need to be information literate. Teacher librarians specialise in teaching information literacy.

Information literacy includes critically reading print, graphics, video, and all learning objects to build knowledge. The information literate seek diverse viewpoints. Information literacy includes the ethical use of information and responsible use of social networking tools.

Studies in the US, Canada, Australia and the UK indicate that school libraries with certified teacher librarians can have a positive impact on student literacy and learning (Jones 2007, Lance 2000, 2002, etc., Small 2008, Todd 2003, and others): 'Student reading scores increase. Students read more. Students say they enjoy reading more. Students are provided with "materials that present more diverse points of view and that better support the curriculum." Students score higher in (US) English Language Arts tests. Students have increased cultural identity. Collections of print and digital resources to support teaching and learning are more dynamic. Students value teacher librarians as teachers, when they are helped to become independent critical information seekers.'

Sue Spence's reporting on the situation in South Australia is a salutary example: "Research shows that students perform better where there is collaboration between teachers and teacher librarians. Despite this, more and more schools in South Australia are inadequately staffed with qualified teacher librarians." Sue also found that "89% of South Australian state secondary schools were understaffed by the Department's own staffing formula. Even worse, staff without teacher librarian qualifications filled forty per cent of all positions" (Spence, S. 2005. "Teacher Librarian Toolkit" in Henri and Asselin eds *The Information literate school community 2*. Wagga Wagga, CSU CIS). See [Survey highlights major problems with library staffing](#)

School libraries are by far the most numerous type of library in Australia and arguably, with public libraries, the most important in determining the attitudes, skills, information and knowledge foundations of our future citizens. The better they are, the better equipped current and future Australians will be.

3. The factors influencing recruitment and development of school librarians:

The relatively lower status of teacher librarians and school librarians in school hierarchies is in many respects a function of 'perception disorder'. When libraries are not considered to be at the absolute pinnacle of a school's learning systems and tools, there is little wonder that those who work in them are seen as expendable, their efforts less supported or even devalued.

In practical terms, the decline in staffing and funding shown in the 2003 research review on school libraries by Michele Lonsdale has continued. Commissioned by the Australian School Library Association and published by the ACER the Lonsdale Report (Read excerpt [here](#). Full Report [here](#).) included statistics on school library staffing in South Australia collected by the Australian Education Union in 2002.

The ASLSP survey results show that 35% of Australian school libraries have no or limited professional staffing. (Many more without staff would not have even responded.) This included 20% of schools with no professional staff at all. In the Northern Territory, 95% of schools, most of them remote, have no teacher librarian. Tasmania, WA and Victoria had the lowest number of teacher librarians employed although one third of Anglican schools have 2 or more teacher librarians.

State schools are at a competitive disadvantage in recruiting. Anglican and Christian schools have more full time professional staff in their libraries with teacher librarians receiving higher salaries than those in other school types.

The recent trend toward devolved, flexible staffing managed largely by school principals, along with dwindling school budgets, has resulted in the increased use of teacher librarians in regular classrooms and the replacement of teacher librarians with less expensive staff.

Teacher librarian training programs have decreased in number from 15 to 3-4 in the past two decades.

There appears to be no national data on teachers undergoing teacher librarian training to help highlight issues and inform and guide planning.

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

Levels of government and local communities

To introduce additional levels of government, community and local institutions in the context of general school under-resourcing, is to risk creating further uncertainty rather than useful outcomes, for the following reasons:

As there are no current national government standards for school libraries to guide their development. (Historically, these did exist. See *Books and Beyond: Guidelines for library resource facilities and services*. Canberra: Schools Commission, 1977, 2nd ed. 1979), to attempt to insert other, even less qualified institutions and agencies into the mix is to insert more ad hocery and the potential for chaos.

Educational leaders need high level support in developing excellent school libraries and excellent teacher librarians, not albeit well-meaning inputs from community and local government sectors (PD in use of Standards for Excellence, IL Standards, Library Standards).

Other institutions

Educators need easy access to the research on the contribution of school libraries and teacher librarians to improved educational outcomes, but institutional and academic research and support in this area is poor. There is no national data on teachers undergoing teacher librarian training. There is no complete national workforce data on teacher librarian numbers and use. No government school data on school library budgets (only surveys such as ASLRP).

Academic institutions thus have the potential to play a vital role. To create quality teachers and pre-service teachers, professional training must include easy access to the research on guided inquiry, information literacy, collaborative planning, and teaching with practising teacher librarians.

State education department support is practically non-existent. DET support services retain no serious consultancy services for government schools in these areas. Some curriculum support services remain.

Professional associations have increasingly had to assume the majority of professional development, yet dependent on volunteers, this is dwindling. Newly appointed untrained

school library staff are often dependent on local teacher librarian networks for their training.

The facts

In the context of resource-poor local government and state education sectors, the ASA considers these kinds of ‘partnerships’ to be at best hypothetical and at worse dangerous possibilities. Far more useful would be a series of co-ordinated exercises to redress the present realities:

In Tasmania only 50% of schools have teacher librarians, in Victoria and ACT 65% (probably lower)

In Western Australia, teacher librarians are not mandated in primary schools at all. In Queensland, teacher-librarian numbers are dwindling. Seven large state high schools on the Gold Coast alone have no teacher librarian. Others have teachers or even library aides in charge who have no formal training. Since 1983, the number of primary school libraries in Melbourne staffed by qualified teacher librarians has dropped dramatically from 55% to 13% (Reynolds and Carroll, 2001). 12% of the school libraries in their survey are managed by someone with no formal qualifications of any kind.

Teacher librarian training programs have also decreased in number from 15 to 3-4 in the past two decades.

The last serious efforts to develop secondary school libraries were made in the 1970s. A similar push was never carried out fully for primary libraries.

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

Books will continue to exist in many formats, printed, e-books, CDRoms, etc. Teacher librarians, in collaboration with teachers, will still be needed to select, purchase, organise and guide access to books and information. Quality information, for example through online databases, is not free and sometimes prohibitively expensive.

The dramatic arrival and growing acceptance of e-books in the past few years, the fact that this delivery format is going to assume a very significant share of the ‘book market’ and represent a key form of reading for millions of people world-wide in a further short space of time, will have a profound impact on the role of libraries and the work of school and teacher librarians. E-books are currently cheaper than print books and are easily accessible via computers and reading devices. School libraries and librarians will need to engage far more closely with these developments.

Teacher librarians willingly update their skills in IT, develop library web access points, digitise data, network with colleagues, review and select online websites, learning

objects, webquests, online databases, social networking tools, etc. But while this is part of their collection development role, their teaching and curriculum support role and their role in improving literacy, they have little opportunity to keep up with let alone utilise the latest advances in informatics.

What can be done:

National standards

Introduce national standards for school libraries and information literacy across all states;

Require that literacy programs and other national curricula should explicitly recognise the central role school libraries have in student achievement, literacy attainment, and preparation for post-secondary success;

Mandate and appoint a qualified teacher librarian with a brief to improve literacy and learning for all Australian students school communities to every school;

Training

Increase teacher librarian training positions in university programs;

Introduce into university programs more advanced formal informatics and digital environment pedagogical training for teachers and teacher librarians;

Funding

Enhance school library budgets to provide for equitable access for all students to books, information and information technology;

Tied funding so that states can adequately staff and fund school library programs and services;

Provide grants for improving literacy through school libraries;

Facilitate national licensing of online databases for school libraries;

Research

Collect national data on school library staffing, funding, and useage;

Develop and publish a national information literacy curriculum;

Fund research into the effect of school library programs and teacher librarians on literacy and learning;

Celebration and focus

On the Canadian model, declare a National School Library Day, along with a National Information Literacy Awareness Month.

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Angelo Loukakis
Executive Director

Note:

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