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Response to

House Standing Committee on Education and Training

Inquiry into School Libraries and Teacher Librarians in Australian Schools

Association of Independent Schools of SA

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Association of Independent Schools of South Australia (AISSA) represents the interests of 96 South Australian not-for-profit Independent schools with an enrolment in excess of 43,300 students. The AISSA welcomes the opportunity to respond to this Inquiry.

The AISSA notes that, while in some schools libraries remain traditional spaces, in many schools, library spaces and facilities have undergone significant changes in order to meet the emerging demands on schools, in particular new approaches to teaching and learning. In some cases this has led to a blurring of the lines between the concept of a library and the concept of a resource centre. The rapid changes in the application of ICT has also blurred the separation of libraries/resource centres from the classroom.

School libraries provide flexible learning spaces, beyond the classroom, and can offer flexible opening hours for students to work before and after school. This flexibility has particular benefits for students unable to access digital technologies and content in their home environment.

South Australian Independent schools have welcomed the increased Australian Government funding from the Building the Education Revolution (BER) and the Digital Education Revolution (DER). This funding has enabled schools to enhance both library facilities and services.

School libraries will play an integral part in the development of e-learning and the use of e-content in association with the DER initiative. Financial support is essential for the Independent school sector to work with teachers and librarians updating their knowledge and skills in the context of the DER and the development of Content Management Systems (CMS) that allow schools to effectively change their practice.

Current arrangements for collecting copyright fees for digital materials provide a significant disincentive to schools to allow wide access to these materials. We note in many cases that the same materials are available free to users outside of schools.

The AISSA cautions against assuming that one staffing model for school libraries/resource centres and set of qualifications is necessary and appropriate in all circumstances. Member schools who provided feedback for this response reported a range of arrangements with regard to the staffing of library facilities, in part due to factors such as cost, school size and location. In addition, they indicated that they were seeking staff with a diverse skills set which can be utilised for whole school community learning. Advances in digital technologies have also expanded the need for schools to recruit people with high-level ICT skills.

The lack of pre-service courses currently available for training teacher librarians has, however, impacted on the ability of schools to recruit appropriately trained teacher librarians with no course currently available in South Australia. While schools have flexibility, for example through employing qualified librarians who are not teachers, they indicated that they would like to

have the option of recruiting capable and skilled teacher librarians, when this meets their individual school needs.

1.0   INTRODUCTION

1.1.   About the AISSA

The Association of Independent Schools of South Australia (AISSA) represents the interests of 96 South Australian not-for-profit Independent schools (100% membership). The SA Independent school sector educates over 43,300 students including a significant number experiencing educational disadvantage. The AISSA has a formal Committee structure that incorporates the key school authorities and interest groups within the Independent school sector.

South Australian Independent schools educate students within a curriculum underpinned by a diverse range of religious affiliations (Anglican, Baptist, Christian, Christadelphian, Greek Orthodox, Islamic, Jewish, Lutheran, Seventh-day Adventist, Uniting) and educational philosophies (Montessori, Waldorf Steiner). The sector also includes a number of secular schools and a special school which educates students with severe intellectual disabilities. A number of Independent schools are also members of a system, for example, the Lutheran Schools Association and Adventist Schools Australia.

Independent schools are distinguished by a model of governance and management based on high levels of local decision making and accountability to school communities. Autonomy is an essential principle underpinning non-systemic Independent schools.

1.2.   Submission Outline

The AISSA responds to the Terms of Reference as they apply to the SA Independent school sector, based on feedback from its member schools.

2.0   THE IMPACT OF RECENT POLICIES AND INVESTMENTS ON SCHOOL LIBRARIES AND THEIR ACTIVITIES

2.1.   Australian Government – Building the Education Revolution and Digital Education Revolution

The AISSA has welcomed the increased Australian Government funding from the Building the Education Revolution (BER) and the Digital Education Revolution (DER). We note that this funding has enabled schools to enhance both library facilities and services.

2.1.1.   BER

In the SA Independent school sector twenty nine projects have been implemented, under the BER, which involve either major construction or re-furbishment of school libraries.

Member schools indicated that this recent investment has made a significant difference to school libraries and resource centres in terms of accessibility of resources, utilisation of resources and maximisation of resource area space for a range of educational activities. These activities include expanded use of teacher librarian skills in teaching research skills, accessing resources and creating reading hot spots for student use.

2.1.2. DER

A total of fifty four schools (all eligible schools) with enrolments in Years 9-12 received funding from the DER to bring computer ratios to 1:1 and an amount for on-cost funding to ensure deployment.

The DER funding has increased the capacity of schools to offer enhanced use of ICT and influenced a shift in approaches to teaching and learning and also strategic thinking with regard to the role of libraries and resource centres – i.e. as an area where students go to learn beyond the classroom. Libraries offer schools flexible means to provide students with appropriate ways to access ICT outside of the traditional classroom but importantly in a positive learning environment.

The DER funding has further highlighted the need for school staff to have updated ICT skills and professional development in the application of these skills for teaching and learning.

2.2. Australian Curriculum

Member schools have indicated that there are potential implications for resource budgets in sourcing teaching and learning materials for the Australian Curriculum, in particular in relation to the new compulsory subjects for R-10. The on-line accessibility of the Australian Curriculum is a good illustration of the emerging demands on schools operating in an ICT rich environment in relation to access to resources.

2.3. Premier's Reading Challenge

In 2009, 96% of Independent schools and 15,146 students participated in the Premier's Reading Challenge. Participation of both schools and students has increased significantly since the program began.

Feedback indicated that the Premier's Reading Challenge has encouraged students to access school libraries. This has required schools to ensure that they have materials in the school library which are suitable to meet a range of learning styles and the interests of children.

2.4. SA State Government Initiative – New SACE

The South Australian State Government has recently introduced a new South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE), which is in place for Stage 1 students in 2010. Stage 2 subjects and requirements are being introduced in 2011.

Under the requirements for the New SACE, South Australian students must complete a Research Project at Stage 2 level, which requires students to identify a research area for investigation. As a consequence students must have access to a significant range of resource materials. Hence, libraries/resource centres will be pivotal as a resource in researching this information, which could place pressures on schools and teacher librarians in accessing hard copy and credible electronic resources.

The assessment requirements for the Research project also require an information literacy understanding as this applies to students developing bibliographic records and recording source materials. This requirement will expand the demand for library/resource centre staff, who are trained in information literacy and research skills, resulting in consequent demands on professional development for school library staff.

3.0 THE FUTURE POTENTIAL OF SCHOOL LIBRARIES AND LIBRARIANS TO CONTRIBUTE TO IMPROVED EDUCATIONAL AND COMMUNITY OUTCOMES, ESPECIALLY LITERACY

3.1. Flexible Spaces for Learning

Library spaces and facilities in many schools have undergone significant changes. In some cases this has led to a blurring of the lines between the concept of a library and the concept of a resource centre. In some schools this has also led to an extending of the availability of spaces so that students can access on-line resources throughout the school rather than in a centralised locality.

Feedback indicated that libraries and teacher librarians have the potential to create a positive environment for the whole school community – staff and students – to access information.

In addition, school libraries can offer flexible opening hours for students to work before and after school in a positive learning environment, for example, with appropriate cyber protection protocols. This flexibility in hours has particular benefits for students unable to access ICT and digital content in their home environment.

An important role of the school library was identified as its ability to cater for multiple literacies, for example, reading for pleasure and reading for information purposes.

3.2. Assistance to Teaching Staff

Feedback from member schools indicated that school librarian's often link across a range of learning areas and can play a significant role in supporting teachers in their planning activities.

In some instances the school librarian assists in choosing and filtering curriculum resource materials, for example, for the New SACE. This necessitates that they have both information and curriculum skills.

School librarians also assist other teaching staff with software applications, for example, clickview, scootle, moodle and share point.

4.0 THE FACTORS INFLUENCING RECRUITMENT AND DEVELOPMENT OF SCHOOL LIBRARIANS

4.1. Recruitment

The AISSA cautions against assuming that one staffing model and set of qualifications is necessary and appropriate in all circumstances. Member schools who provided feedback for this response reported a range of arrangements with regard to the staffing of library facilities in part due to factors such as cost, school size and location. In some cases, for example in larger schools, schools have dedicated library staff while in other cases the librarian works across classroom areas.

Advances in digital technologies and ICT has also expanded the need for schools to recruit people with greater ICT skills, such as in the areas of Interactive Whiteboards and Web 2.0.

Feedback indicated that schools were seeking school librarians with a diverse skills set which can be utilised for whole school community learning. The diversity of student populations has meant that libraries need to cater for a range of different types of learners. Hence, librarians must be able to link in with the needs of students and locate appropriate resources for a range of learning styles and requirements.

The location of computer facilities, including lap tops, and other digital technologies such as cameras, within many library facilities has also changed the skills needed for librarians and support staff. For example, in some schools, librarians and support staff are responsible for maintaining digital equipment.

Member schools indicated that they had experienced difficulties in recruiting appropriately trained teacher librarians. While schools have flexibility, for example through employing non teacher qualified librarians or utilising the services of teachers without library qualifications (but who have the capacity to work with others with relevant skills), they indicated that depending on individual school needs they would like to have the option of recruiting capable and skilled teacher librarians.

4.2. Professional Development

Access to in-service professional development was seen to be a key issue in enabling library staff to update and enhance their skills, in particular in relation to ICT.

4.3. Teacher Training

There is a view among some schools that there is likely to be a shortage of appropriately skilled and trained teacher librarians due to demographic issues, for example, the ageing teacher workforce.

The lack of courses currently available for training teacher librarians has also impacted on the ability of schools to recruit appropriately trained teacher librarians with no course currently available in South Australia.

5.0 THE ROLE OF DIFFERENT LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT AND LOCAL COMMUNITIES AND OTHER INSTITUTIONS IN PARTNERING WITH AND SUPPORTING SCHOOL LIBRARIANS

Feedback from member schools indicated the importance of fostering good relationships with local libraries and universities in order to enable staff and students to have access to a wide range of materials beyond the school. Some schools also share their library/ resource facilities with the wider community.

Organisations such as the School Library Association of SA (SLASA), Australian School Library Association (ASLA) and Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) were also seen as important in providing support for school librarians in South Australia.

6.0 THE IMPACT AND POTENTIAL OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES TO ENHANCE AND SUPPORT THE ROLES OF SCHOOL LIBRARIES AND LIBRARIANS

6.1. Access to Digital Materials

School libraries need to play an integral part in the development of e-learning and the use of e-content in association with the DER initiative of the Australian Government. Financial support is essential for the sector to work with teachers and librarians updating knowledge and skills in the context of the DER and the development of Content Management Systems (CMS) that allow schools to effectively change their practice. The ICT skill level of teachers and teacher librarians is a more fundamental issue than the availability of the digital technology in enhancing the role of libraries and teacher librarians.

Schools noted that access to digital materials is useful, however, the quality of materials can be an issue. Hence, it is seen to be essential that on-line materials are monitored to ensure both appropriateness and quality of content. Students also need assistance, support and guidance in understanding how they can best use digital technologies and evaluate materials on the web. School librarians can assist in this area.

In addition, there are issues with regard to accessing some digital materials. For example, a large number of fiction materials are still not available digitally. There are also equity issues with regard to students unable to access digital materials outside of school.

6.2. On-line Subscription Services

On-line subscription services such as the Schools Catalogue Information Service (SCIS) have made some of the routine tasks for teacher librarians easier. However, in the Independent school sector each school must pay individually for the service while their counterparts in Government schools are provided with the service by the central office. For some small Independent schools these costs are a disincentive to good and efficient practice.

6.3. Copyright Fees

Current arrangements for collecting copyright fees for digital materials provide a significant disincentive to schools to allow wide access to these materials. We note in many cases the same materials are available free to users outside of schools.

6.4. Staffing

Member schools noted potential implications for the staffing of school libraries due to increased demands on teacher librarians as a result of managing digital technologies.

In addition, in some cases resource staff will need to undertake significant in-service professional development in the use of digital technologies in order to improve their capacity to lead and support students and teachers in a range of learning activities.