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House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training

Inquiry into school libraries and teacher librarians in Australian schools

Summary

Libraries are best served by trained, specialised staff.

Educating and collection building require curriculum understanding. Librarians are educators as well as information specialists. Library facilities and resources represent a very significant school investment needing care and management to operate to best effect. The current prevalence of cutting back teacher librarians as a school cost saving exercise is false economy. Teacher librarians are uniquely placed to contribute to improved educational outcomes for students.

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

A great deal of BER money has been invested in new school libraries. In order to maximise returns on this investment, libraries must be adequately staffed by trained teacher librarians. This is in contrast to the trend that has emerged over recent years where librarians have been viewed by principals as dispensable when cost cutting is required. A poorly managed library facility results in loss and damage to expensive resources but the greatest loss is the human relationship provided by an educator in the dual role of teacher and librarian. The face to face teaching and learning provided through this key, cross curriculum role can not be compensated for by technology alone. Understanding curriculum needs and individual student differences is the domain of the educator – not computers or even technicians.

- *the future potential of school libraries and librarians to contribute to improved educational and community outcomes, especially literacy;*

A well staffed, well cared for library facility can provide a learning hub and heart within the school environment. Librarians work across the whole curriculum and are in a unique position to collaborate with other teachers. Librarians are trained to be information managers and gatekeepers. Whether that information provides the key to classic literature enjoyment or how to access the latest digital technology, librarians are able to facilitate learning. Librarians specialise in literacy in all of its forms and in making it accessible to students.

- *the factors influencing recruitment and development of school librarians;*

The most significant factor affecting school librarians is **the value attributed to the role they play within the educational setting**. Valuing the existing body of trained librarians is a good place to start here! Deploying them back into libraries instead of diverting librarians into other areas would be a welcome trend. School

leadership teams must collaborate in upholding the role of teacher librarians as curriculum leaders, collaborators, learning facilitators, information managers and educators with the unique possibility of touching the lives and learning of all students across the school.

- *the role of different levels of government and local communities and other institutions in partnering with and supporting school librarians*

An expectation that libraries funded by the BER are staffed and managed by trained librarians would help to ensure that these facilities are used to guarantee improved student learning outcomes.

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

For many years now, librarians have promoted information literacy within schools. Training and professional development has equipped librarians with the skills to assist students in becoming life long learners. Recognition that we live in an increasingly complex and information dense society has seen librarians focus on the skills of learning how to learn. Without abandoning literature enrichment and appreciation programmes, a steady focus on the information process has been maintained. Librarians have been adapting and responding to changing technologies as an essential part of their role for a considerable time. Huge changes have occurred within the library landscape over the past two decades. Staying abreast of these changes and incorporating them into meaningful learning experiences for students, forms the basis of teacher librarianship training. Technology has been enhancing and supporting the roles of libraries and librarians for many years. The warmth of genuine, human relationships helps to mediate and distil meaningful, learning experiences for students with real life relevance as opposed to technology for technology's sake.

Recommendations

BER funded libraries need to account for how these facilities will be staffed including a component requirement of teacher librarianship according to the size of school and student population.