



7th April 2010

To: The Secretary
Australian Parliament House of Representatives
Standing Committee on Education and Training

Inquiry into school libraries and teacher librarians in Australian schools

Congratulations to Minister for Education Julia Gillard for calling for this inquiry into school libraries and teacher librarians in Australian schools. School library communities across the world will be watching with great interest in the outcome of this inquiry as a ground-swell of support for school libraries and the unique place they hold in the education and learning of young people everywhere is becoming more and more evident.

In November last year The *Strengthening Kids' Interest in Learning and Libraries Act*, or the SKILLS Act, was re-introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives. This legislation is intended to ensure that all students will have the support and resources they need for a quality education by establishing a goal that all public school libraries employ no less than one highly qualified school library media specialist.

In March the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) in the UK published their *Library and Information Manifesto* which sets out six priorities for the next Westminster government. The first of these is to:

- Make school libraries statutory and develop an action plan for bringing this about within the lifetime of the next Parliament.

Every child deserves the best education possible and schools that provide a library that is well resourced will be ensuring high levels of literacy and learning outcomes for these students. One of the most widely recognised research papers outlining this is the Research Foundation Paper *School Libraries Work!* This shows evidence supporting school libraries.

http://www2.scholastic.com/content/collateral_resources/pdf/s/slw3_2008.pdf

There are several links in this report to other research undertaken on the value of school libraries, including extensive evidence based practice carried out by Dr Ross Todd, associate professor at Rutgers University and Director for their centre for international scholarship in school libraries who began his career as a teacher in Australia.

A school library which is well resourced and adequately staffed can contribute greatly to improved educational outcomes with literacy being a pivotal role. A suitably qualified librarian with deep knowledge and understanding of the curriculum will successfully be able to work with other staff to ensure that all types of literacy requirements are met within class teaching and research tasks. This would include information literacy, critical literacy and Web 2.0 literacy as well as developing and fostering a love of literature and reading.

Collaboration between librarians, teacher-librarians and teaching staff is crucial to ensure quality teaching and equitable access to information and resources is constant across curricula, across departments and year levels and into every school in every country. In order for this to happen, governments must acknowledge the evidence for why school libraries work and then legislate for consistency regardless of the size, geography or ethnic diversity of schools while still allowing school communities to introduce their own imprint on the flavour of their school.

Here in New Zealand the National Library school services division along with the Ministry of Education wrote a publication entitled *The School Library and Learning in the Information Landscape: Guidelines for New Zealand Schools*, Learning Media, Wellington, 2002. This discusses what the information landscape looks like and the guiding principles to a successful school library including Information Literacy, Service, Reading, Access, Information Resources and Place.

Then in 2005 the New Zealand Education Review Office published a report on *Student Learning in the Information Landscape*, Crown copyright, 2005. After reviewing libraries in a number of schools across the country, this report focused on the connection (infrastructure), content (resources) and capability and confidence (skills, attitudes and values).

In all of these reports and research papers it becomes clear that the only way forward is to have full government support to ensure the appropriate physical spaces; staffing, including training and recruitment; resources, financing for both print and online resources to meet the needs of the students and staff.

The School Library Association of New Zealand Aotearoa will watch with interest the submissions made to this inquiry, the findings of the committee and the outcomes for every school in Australia. I hope the Australian government sees this as a unique opportunity to create and support a robust system of learning that will allow for the growth and development of independent learning and thinking which will impact on society in all aspects well into the 21st century.

Yours sincerely

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