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Inquiry into school libraries and teacher librarians in Australian schools

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

Preface: Research both in Australia and internationally demonstrates that school libraries and teacher librarians have made positive contributions to student learning outcomes.

The student of today needs comprehension, literacy, critical thinking and information skills as much as ever. Some recent studies even indicate that the myth of the “Google Generation” has misrepresented youth attributing them with “innate” knowledge and skills in accessing, understanding and using information (British Library & JISC 2008). This idea, that the “digital native” does not need instruction in the essential literacies is foolish and neglectful. Additionally, few would argue the value of story and literature to society, to literacy and to learning. Because children are wonderfully individual and have broad predilections and interests, the need for collections of stories is vital in order to connect all young people to narrative and reading. Libraries are an essential piece of this equation. The value of libraries and specialists such as teacher librarians is undeniable and the need for the continued support of these by governments is essential in today’s world and more so in the future given the challenges posed by new information landscapes.

The need for specialist instruction into essential literacies and the importance of school libraries in this process is highlighted extensively in Australian research. The conclusion drawn by Lyn Hay and Dr Ross Todd in Australia’s most recent study into school libraries provides an example of the findings and states that:

The burgeoning growth of digital information; unprecedented levels in the production of global information where quality and authority of information

is often not contested; and the emergence of participatory and collaborative web environments all provide an even richer case for the necessity of school libraries as a unique learning space to develop the intellectual, social and personal agency of students to learn and live and be productive citizens in a 21st century world. (2010)

Support from academic research which verifies this conclusion can be found in the work titled *Student learning through Australian school libraries*

Part 1: A statistical analysis of student perceptions (Hay, 2005) which analysed 6718 survey respondents and found the data clearly demonstrated that the school library played a vital role in supporting student learning. Lonsdale's investigation into the *Impact of School Libraries on Student Achievement: A Review of the Research* (Lonsdale, 2003) provides a comprehensive overview of studies assessing school library impact both before and after 1990 and affirms that there is a proven link between school libraries and student achievement. Further confirmation of the positive impact school libraries make on student results is provided by the analysis of the difference in literacy achievements between use and non-use of the library, in *Mapping Literacy Achievement: Results of the 1996 National School English Literacy Survey* (Management Committee for the National School English Literacy Survey, 1997). Finally, Susan La Marca and Pam Macintyre's research into reading tells us that:

Most critical in the development of a child reader is the presence of an adult who is sufficiently knowledgeable about books and reading, and well informed about the needs and interests of children and young people to 'match' particular resources with individual students. (2006, p25)

In the international arena there is also much evidence that school libraries and teacher librarians contribute to enhanced student achievement. The research paper *School Libraries Work* (2008) is one such account which presents information from the United States of America demonstrating the measurable impact school libraries and library media specialists have on student achievement. A Canadian analysis of the relationship between student achievement and library resources and staff was undertaken by The Ontario Library Association and published in 2006. This study assessed data from more than 50 000 Canadian students and "confirms previous international research that there is a relationship between a school library's staff and resources and the achievement and enjoyment of reading of its students" (p.9) The information from British studies further reinforces the importance of school libraries, an example of which is the paper *Information Behaviour of the Researcher of the Future* commissioned by the British Library which concludes that "Information skills are needed more than ever and these skills need to be inculcated during the formative years of childhood: by university or college it is too late to reverse engineer deeply ingrained habits, notably an uncritical trust in branded search engines to deliver quick fixes." (British Library & JISC 2008, p32) Europeans, too, have acknowledged "that the quality of students' learning outcomes is greatly enhanced by effective school libraries" (INSIL 2003) as stated in the Amsterdam Statement on School

Libraries and Information Literacy which was developed by representatives of associations for teachers and librarians as well as some ministers from Austria, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Russia, Sweden and the United Kingdom.

By providing this small cross section of national and international research this submission has highlighted the fact that research and data repetitively demonstrates the potential of school libraries and librarians to contribute to improved educational and community outcomes, especially literacy. This should be taken into serious consideration by policy makers interested in the best outcomes for Australian students.

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