



## FINTONA *Girls' School*

### **Inquiry into school libraries and teacher librarians in Australian Schools**

**Response from Fintona Girls' School**  
**79 Balwyn Road**  
**Balwyn, 3103**

#### **Terms of Reference**

To inquire into and report on the role, adequacy and resourcing of school libraries and teacher librarians in Australia's public and private school. Specifically, the committee should focus on:

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

The current and future planning and policies of Schools, and the support of Government policy and funding can have a great impact on School libraries, particularly the development of the physical environment and facilities, including computer access for staff and students. Initiatives including the National Curriculum will also necessitate changes in the Library collection development and information delivery systems as well as future planning strategies.

The changing nature of information use and access due to technological changes continues to affect budget planning and expenditure, and the effective promotion of both print resources and online facilities to staff and students.

The scope and efficiency of the role of the teacher-librarian in supporting the curriculum of a School requires the direct support of School management and regular collaboration with the Curriculum Co-ordinator in particular as well as Faculty Co-ordinators and teaching staff.

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

Libraries should be a vibrant hub of school life – a place where all students have the chance to find educational success, to indulge and experience excitement and wonder and to experience their own success and form their own opinions without fear or judgement. Our enjoyment of literature can only be measured against our own experiences of literature and of life.

We continue to define our position in the world and our understanding of ourselves and others through our experience and our imagination. Imagination is developed through exposing ourselves to story, and our experience of the world is enhanced and made exciting by our prior experience and understanding – mostly gained through what we read. The School Library and its facilitator is the place where this experience starts.

The role of the teacher-librarian is unique in schools. They specialise in awareness of the resources available, and the selection of those relevant to the curriculum; in assessing and catering for the changing needs of the curriculum in conjunction with budgetary considerations, and the provision of resources in a variety of formats appropriate to the requirements of staff and students. Maintaining an appealing and relevant collection is essential and requires constant attention, a carefully considered policy of collection development, and judicious updating and removal of irrelevant and obsolete items.

Teacher-librarians ensure that students know what is available to them in the school and in the wider community and can find what they need using a variety of systems of information retrieval. The nature of the teacher-librarian qualification enables them to have the relevant expertise in both information selection and use, and the teaching skills to teach students how to use these effectively. The ability to do this requires efficient administrative support which enables the teacher-librarian to fulfil their role of assisting staff and students with the specifics of research in the class situations. This requires the regular and repeated reinforcement of skills which are then recognised and assessed by the subject teacher.

Teacher-librarians can teach students to think critically, to experience regular success in their search for information and discrimination in their use of it. They can be instrumental in continuing to help students refine and hone their skills.

Teacher-librarians are in a position to liaise with and reinforce the skills and regularly refine the content being taught by subject teachers, based on the availability of a variety of sources of information, and potentially with all students on a regular basis as they are not as restricted by timetables as teaching staff can be.

The teacher-librarian also selects material and promotes reading in the school and, in particular, can support the English curriculum through the promotion of wider reading. They have the opportunity to introduce students to a variety of literature and to make a difference to their interest in and enjoyment of reading both at school and beyond. The personal reading experience and enthusiasm of the teacher-librarian has the potential to make a long-term difference to students' enjoyment of reading and literature. Teacher-librarians are also in a position to encourage teaching staff to read a selection of age appropriate fiction through judicious recommendations. This enables them to be in a position to promote literature through personal experience and adds impact to the promotion of reading to students.

Teacher-librarians are fundamental in promoting a school dynamic of curiosity about learning, of interest in the world, of a sense of social responsibility, and of an interest in lifelong experience and learning – essential in this age of limitless access to information.

This service to the school community requires constant financial and management support from the school, evaluation of the available resources and strategic planning as trends emerge.

These tasks are never complete. Resources need to continually be re-assessed and re-catalogued to suit curriculum changes. Teaching staff do not have the time or the expertise to provide the same experience of literature or to ensure that efficient systems are in place for information retrieval.

Let's give our children and young people the best possible chance of having positive personal experiences – through constant access to, and promotion of information and literature; and attention to detail in the provision of efficient systems of access and retrieval. Information and the way we access it may change, but the need for teaching skills and encouraging curiosity are fundamental to developing enquiring minds.

- **The factors influencing recruitment and development of school librarians**

It is difficult to determine the best way of determining an appropriate ratio of Teacher-librarian / other Library support staff / teaching staff / students. The needs and priorities of each school can be affected by a variety of other factors including AV and ICT support, school policies and perception of the role of the Library and its staff, the amount of research required by the school curriculum and the amount of curriculum change regularly taking place in a School.

Tertiary courses with sufficient places in teacher-librarianship and for Library technicians in their specific roles are essential for enabling teacher-librarians to fulfil their role effectively in schools.

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

Students should be encouraged to take the skills they learn in the School Library to other libraries in the community. The skills taught need to be transferrable, and students need to be given the opportunity to learn this by experience. The School Library specialises in the curriculum needs of the school. Other libraries provide access to a wide assortment of information.

The State Library is a resource which all students should be encouraged to learn about and use.

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

Technological developments have caused huge changes to teaching and learning and continue to impact on many aspects of Library policy and future planning in schools. They do not diminish the role of the teacher-librarian but rather make the teaching and learning of effective critical information selection skills increasingly necessary. It also behoves the teacher-librarian to remain at the forefront of new technologies, to select and implement appropriate online information sources with due consideration of curriculum, planning and budget; to find new, interesting and relevant ways of providing access to these for their School community, and to ensure that they are promoted effectively. It is also important to maintain effective promotion of the book collection, as a balanced approach to research using all available resources in all formats continues to be the most effective research strategy.

Teacher-librarians are responsible for ensuring that students have access to relevant and appropriate information in digital formats, that students and staff have the opportunity to learn and teach using various forms of technology, that these are available in the school when required, and that the teaching of relevant skills in information selection, evaluation and use occurs in a sequential program. They need to assist in ensuring that technology is available to staff as a teaching tool as widely as possible, and they should be involved in future planning. This includes assisting and supporting the implementation and use of learning platforms.

The teacher-librarian serves as a mediator between the teaching staff, the ICT staff, and the Curriculum Co-ordinator in the selection and provision of both the information sources, and access to these in the school. Awareness of curriculum content and teaching practise is essential to this. Appropriate strategic planning with a global perspective on the school and its potential future needs is essential and the teacher-librarian is in a position to assist in decision making processes.

The teacher-librarian also has a global perspective on the curriculum and is in a position to liaise with the Curriculum Co-ordinator and to make recommendations/suggestions regarding future curriculum content and change based on current and changing educational trends. This includes re-defining the allocation of the school budget so that information sources in all relevant formats are purchased and maintained each year with due consideration of the facilities available in the school for accessing information and recommendations for directions and priorities for future expansion.

#### **Role of the Library as perceived by teaching staff in different faculties:**

While there has been an increasing reliance on digital technologies as sources of information, libraries are still a vital resource for students particularly with research tasks and undertaking any search for information.

Libraries still provide a **reliable** source of information as opposed to many readily accessible websites on the Internet. It is far easier to check the credentials of the writer of a particular book, whereas with the Internet students find it far more difficult to check the authenticity and reliability of material that is posted on the Internet.

Reading a book and evaluating and selecting the most relevant material, challenges students to think about the material critically, rather than simply downloading from the Internet. The temptation to cut and paste is more likely to be avoided in this way.

Teacher-librarians are an invaluable resource in preparing research tasks. Discussions with the teacher-librarian when planning a task can reveal resources in the Library that a teacher might not be aware of and they can prepare a bibliography for the students. In my case the teacher-librarian has prepared Pathfinders to direct the students to the resources in the Library, including reference material, digital resources, online databases and other resources which open up an enormous variety of information to the students. All of these activities contribute to an improvement in student literacy and confidence in accessing, selecting and assessing the information they need.

A teacher-librarian is an important resource in developing the students' note-taking skills and selecting relevant information. Note-taking grids prepared by the Librarian based on the resources available in the Library and directed to the criteria of specific assignments are of enormous assistance to students and encourage a consistent approach to research across all subject areas.

I have also collaborated with the teacher-librarian in the preparation of a school bibliographic style guide, and in teaching students how to record and footnote sources of information correctly in preparation for the requirements of tertiary study. This encourages a consistent whole school expectation from all students.

Access to online databases is an important resource for the students and one that is possibly under-utilised. There is a need for students and staff to be made fully aware of the databases available for students. Staff need to be constantly aware of the resources available and to be shown how to access them as they are the ones who will encourage the students to use them and assess the content of the assignments they submit.

Anecdotal evidence has suggested that because students have greater access to computers and the Internet, particularly in laptop schools that this has resulted in a failure to maintain the standards of libraries. This would be a most retrograde step. We would be failing our students if we did not prepare them adequately for the challenges of tertiary education.

In essence I think teacher-librarians have a vital role in the future in maintaining the quality of written resources and an ever more expanding role in keeping the staff and students informed of the digital and online resources available

Mrs Sue Woolley  
Head of Humanities

#### **What teacher-librarians do:**

- Provide support and information for students to help them work in various subject areas, complete research and assignments.
- Assist students to master technology and complete research online
- Differentiate between the different forms of online material, to be able to discern the appropriate from the inappropriate
- Provide an environment that is inclusive and user friendly
- Encourage students to embrace technology but also to encourage students to be read and embrace story
- Encourage students to learn respect for a space and allow others to use that space appropriately

#### **What teacher-librarians could do with increased staffing and resources:**

- Provide further and more comprehensive support and information for students to help them work in various subject areas, complete research and assignments.

- Provide further support and information for staff to help them work in various subject areas, complete research assignments and be aware of what students are using
- Assist students to master technology and complete research online
- Assist staff to master technology , to highlight all the technology available and how it can be used as a teaching and learning tool, and to conduct PD sessions on that technology (ie. Facebook, YouTube, etc.)
- At the start of a new subject or unit, to assist students in understanding the material available.

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