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Parents and Citizens Committee
Giralang Primary School
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The Secretary
Standing Committee into school libraries and
teacher librarians in Australian Schools

**Submission from Giralang Primary School (ACT) Parents and
Citizens Committee**

Dear Secretary

The Parents and Citizens (P&C) Committee of Giralang Primary School welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Committee's terms of reference for their inquiry into school libraries and teacher librarians.

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

In the 2008 school year, Giralang Primary School did not have a dedicated librarian. The P&C Committee is firmly of the opinion that a school without a dedicated librarian faces a number of challenges in delivering quality literacy education, including information literacy, to its students.

The main concerns parents have where a teacher librarian is not employed are:

- the time of other teachers is stretched as they are required to cover library sessions. Library lessons are also reduced in line with these stretched resources.
- Library lessons and book borrowing are less frequent; and
- Parents are unable to get advice on what books are good to read to encourage and maintain their child's interest in reading.

At Giralang Primary School the presence of a teacher librarian also creates an alternative place for students to go at break times, thereby further exposing them to books and literacy.

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

The importance of the school library to the school community as a whole cannot be underestimated. Instilling a love of reading into children is of the utmost importance to parents and the wider community. Literacy underpins all aspects of life from social interaction to family wellbeing and into the workplace.

Literacy is also now one of the key bench-marks for evaluating schools as evidenced by the introduction of the MySchool web site. The parents at Giralang Primary School therefore highly value any resource that can improve our children's outcomes in this area. Parents are convinced that the presence of a dedicated teacher librarian assists in improving literacy skills.

In addition a trained librarian is able to equip students with other skills needed to succeed academically. This includes the ability to use a library and its resources, including encyclopaedias, for research. While the internet has provided easy, at home research access for students, proper instruction in both digital and paper based research is essential for ongoing academic success of students, as they progress through the school system.

The factors influencing recruitment and development of school librarians

4.2.2 Qualification Requirements for School Teacher Librarians (ACT government policy on School Teacher qualifications)

School teachers appointed to permanent, temporary or long- term part-time positions as a school teacher librarian should possess the following qualifications:

- *completion of a pre-service professional school teacher education, including components outlined in 4.1.1; and*
- *a librarianship qualification that meets the requirements of Associate Membership of the Library Association of Australia (ALIA) or equivalent.*

ACT Government policy on the recruitment of teacher librarians recognises the special qualifications required to undertake this position. The P&C Committee support the current level of specialised qualifications required for a teacher librarian.

With the increased use in digital technologies the work required from a teacher librarian will continue to change and support at the highest levels for ongoing development is required.

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

For smaller schools like Giralang Primary a specialist librarian comprises approximately 8 per cent of teaching staff in the school which can be perceived as allocating funding away from mainstream teaching. The P&C Committee support the presence of a teacher librarian in our school and would recommend that further government support in funding these positions would demonstrate government commitment to libraries in schools and increasing literacy rates amongst students.

Parents at Giralang Primary School take a hands-on role in the activities of the library by donating their time to assist the librarian. It is estimated that parents volunteer 2-3 hours per week in the library. In addition, voluntary contributions made to the school can be nominated by individual parents to be allocated towards the library trust fund. Parents also donate used books to improve library resources.

The P&C Committee have also provided funding for items such as bean bags to make the library a safe and welcoming place for students.

The P&C Committee can see a place for other institutions such as business or other academic institutions in partnering with schools to support and maintain school libraries. Government support in establishing such a scheme would be required, as schools have limited resources to dedicate to sourcing and maintaining such arrangements.

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

The Giralang Primary School P&C Committee supports the introduction of digital technologies into libraries to assist and enhance library programs. It is important that any digital technology introduced to libraries is age appropriate, with a quick and easy search function that students of all ages can use.

The P&C Committee supports the use of online content such as journals and encyclopaedias for the senior grades, to assist in the development of information literacy skills. At present, however, the costs of subscriptions are prohibitive for individual schools even though it would be beneficial to the learning of the students. The P&C Committee recommends that governments consider the purchase of subscriptions to quality online content for all schools.

At some schools, though not at Giralang Primary School, the teacher librarian is also the computing teacher, meaning that library skills are not taught as the timetabling forces schools to choose between computing and library skills. The P&C Committee recognises and values the special skills that a teacher librarian brings to a school and would be highly concerned about increased requirements to teach subjects additional to their library duties.

Conclusion

The P&C Committee firmly believe that all schools should have a dedicated teacher librarian to reinforce and enhance ongoing literacy programs. Government support, at all levels, is essential for ongoing quality teaching of library and research skills throughout primary and secondary schooling. Governments must also ensure that libraries are not only appropriately staffed but also sufficiently resourced with paper-based, digital and online assets.

Thank you for taking the time to consider our submission.

Yours sincerely

Janelle Kennard
President