Submission

House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training

Inquiry into school libraries and teacher librarians in Australian schools

This submission has been prepared by the Association of Independent Schools of NSW (AISNSW) following consultation with a wide range of independent schools and other stakeholders.

For further enquiries or additional information relating to this submission please contact:

Julie Thompson

Director of Professional Development

The Association of Independent Schools of NSW

Level 12, 99 York Street

SYDNEY NSW 2000

The AIS will be pleased to elaborate on any aspects of this submission at the Committee's invitation and discretion.

Yours sincerely

Dr Geoff Newcombe

Executive Director

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INTRODUCTION

The Association of Independent Schools of New South Wales (AISNSW) is the peak state body representing the independent schools sector in this State. The Association represents more than 430 schools enrolling approximately 173,000 students, accounting for some 15 per cent of NSW school enrolments.

Independent schools are a diverse group of non-government schools serving a range of different communities. Many independent schools provide a religious or values-based education. Others promote a particular educational philosophy or interpretation of mainstream education. Independent schools include:

- Schools affiliated with Christian denominations, such as Anglican, Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Seventh Day Adventist and Uniting Church schools
- Non-denominational Christian schools
- Islamic schools
- Jewish schools
- Montessori schools
- Rudolf Steiner schools
- Schools constituted under specific Acts of Parliament, such as Grammar schools
- Community schools
- Schools that specialise in meeting the needs of students with disabilities.

Independent schools are not-for-profit institutions founded by religious or other groups in the community and are registered with the registering authority, the NSW Board of Studies. Most independent schools are set up and governed independently on an individual school basis. However, some independent schools with common aims and educational philosophies are governed and administered as systems, for example the Anglican and Seventh-day Adventist systems.

The Association of Independent Schools of NSW provides a wide range of services to independent schools throughout NSW to support their provision of education. This provision is supported by wide consultation with stakeholders.

This submission draws on the views of independent schools, librarians, teacher librarians and other educational and professional staff with expertise and experience in the provision of information and library services to a wide range of students, teachers and schools.

BACKGROUND

The AIS NSW plays a pivotal role in the administration of grants across the independent school sector.

In the context of this inquiry into school libraries, the AIS is able to present relevant information, as it plays a significant role in ensuring equity of access in the funding of
- grants under the Digital Revolution
- grants for the building or upgrading of libraries under the BER
- grants under the Australian Quality Teaching Program
- grants under Commonwealth Targeted Programs

The AIS NSW facilitates the professional development of staff who are employed within the independent sector. Services offered include:
- the dissemination of information
- the provision of quality professional development programs
- professional development for individual schools
- co-ordination of externally funded programs and initiatives

The AIS NSW, in its capacity as a provider of professional development, has had a long-standing relationship with teacher-librarians from within the sector.

Under the auspices of the AIS NSW Teacher-Librarians' Network teacher-librarians have been able to exchange ideas and share resources. They organise professional development that has involved attending as well as running courses, workshops and conferences.

An indication of their commitment to their profession has been their ongoing involvement in their own professional development, as well as their commitment to supporting colleagues by being prepared to showcase their own learning and practice. Current examples include presentations at conferences for school executives and presentations to New Scheme Teachers.

The availability of Australian Government Quality Teaching Program funding has enabled AIS NSW to provide teacher-librarians with ongoing opportunities to collaborate with subject teachers on cross-curricular projects co-ordinated by AIS educational consultants.

These projects and the above mentioned PD have allowed teacher-librarians within this sector to keep abreast of the changes within their field and to showcase libraries and library programs that continue to evolve to support the changing teaching and learning needs of students and teachers in independent schools in NSW.

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With a supportive principal, collaborative colleagues and support staff, teacher-librarians are able to transform older as well as brand new facilities into the flexible learning spaces that they need to be in the 21st Century. A school library should be there to feed both the mind and the imagination – the heart of the school.

Teacher-librarians are very clear and indeed often passionate about their professional role in a school as both a teacher and a manager of information. A teacher-librarian has qualifications in both areas.

In 2007 the AIS NSW set up ISTAA to oversee the accreditation of teachers. In the context of the inquiry into teacher-librarians, it is important to point out that teacher-librarians in the NSW independent sector are able to comply with the teaching requirements of the standards and that they are able to do so working within the school library environment. Teacher-librarians participated in the consultations process when the standards were set up, and participate in the current accreditation process.

The teacher-librarians in this sector have cross-sectoral connections through other professional bodies, such as the Australian School Library Association and the Australian Library and Information Association.

This submission will address only the following 4 Terms of Reference:

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

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

3. **The factors influencing recruitment and development of school librarians**

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

TERM OF REFERENCE 1 : THE IMPACT OF RECENT POLICIES AND INVESTMENTS ON SCHOOL LIBRARIES AND THEIR ACTIVITIES

The AIS is playing a pivotal role in the administration of funds to schools under both the Digital and the Building Education Revolution. Schools in this sector vary greatly both in terms of facilities and online access. The importance of the flexibility that exists under current government programs to meet the individual needs of such varied schools is extremely important. Such flexibility can ensure a high quality of outcome.

The Digital Revolution may have a significant impact in those schools where there was limited online access in the past. It has enabled schools to build on their current capacity.

This in turn may impact on the school library in some schools, as the library may be the one place in the school, where students have consistent online access.

It is the teacher-librarian in many schools who collaborates with the IT specialist to choose software, provide access to information databases and help facilitate the professional development of staff in the use of digital resources.

All schools in Australia have access to federally funded digital learning resources through the The Learning Federation. These are made available for independent schools via the Scootle website. The AIS provides schools with Scootle accounts.

It has been noticeable that more schools have availed themselves of these online resources recently, which might partly be explained by the provision of new Smartboards in some schools and also by the fact that some schools now have a greater capacity for providing students with online access.

A significant number of schools have taken the opportunity to build new or refurbish older libraries using funds made available by the Building the Education Revolution (BER). These projects indicate that the community continues to value libraries as an important component of school life.

A school library is more than a space, and in the 21st Century it needs to be a flexible learning space that accommodates a rich fiction and non-fiction collection, as well a place that provides safe access to a myriad of online resources.

At the core of both the Digital Revolution and the BER lie the learning needs of the Australian school student of the 21st Century.

While schools may build or refurbish libraries and buy state of the art hardware, it is only when the libraries are staffed by passionate well trained teacher-librarians and the hardware is used by passionate well trained teachers, that these tools and facilities are exploited to their full potential to support the learning needs of the students.

The on-going funding and support for schools under the current Australian Government programs is extremely important. Schools prepare citizens of the future. All students should have access to libraries that provide equitable access to resources. As part of a flexible funding mix there should be a provision for the staffing of teacher-librarians in every school and adequate support for them so that they can fulfil their teaching role.

TERM OF REFERENCE 2 : THE FUTURE POTENTIAL OF SCHOOL LIBRARIES AND LIBRARIANS TO CONTRIBUTE TO IMPROVED EDUCATIONAL AND COMMUNITY OUTCOMES, ESPECIALLY LITERACY

The impact of school libraries and teacher librarians on educational outcomes has been well documented, especially overseas. (This part of the submission is informed by studies that are currently referred to by the teacher-librarian community itself.)

If school libraries are well funded, and well staffed by qualified teacher-librarians, they will have the potential to contribute to improved educational outcomes, especially in the field of literacy.

Literacy today encompasses not only the basics of reading and writing, but also visual and digital literacy. Students live in a society that has an increasingly global knowledge-based economy.

School libraries play a vital role in basic literacy acquisition. They provide the books that allow students to read for pleasure. In a learning context this allows students to expand their vocabularies. This time honoured role of school libraries will not change, regardless whether the book appears in more than one type of format.

However, with the impact of Web 2.0 the information highway has not only become a lot faster but it has also changed. 21st Century students can take part in collaborative digital networking at a local, national, and global level. They can produce interactive content and communicate instantly with an individual or a group. We know that they can do this 24 hours a day.

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Part of the contribution that the school library and the teacher-librarian can make is to ensure that students from the time they begin to learn to read and write, are also taught those information and digital literacy skills that will enable them to make informed and critical choices when accessing digital resources or participating in interactive environments online.

The community should expect that in terms of educational outcomes, the teacher-librarian plays a significant role in teaching students to become a well rounded digital citizen. A well rounded digital citizen is literate, understands cyber safety, and is ethical in accessing information and participating in the online world.

It is via the school library that students can access a rich range of digital resources that have been chosen and **mediated** by the teacher-librarian. It is pertinent here to mention that teacher-librarians have a cross-curricular focus and will consult with colleagues to ensure that students have access to specialist content.

Whether this content is available only in the library as with some database content, or available well beyond the library varies from school to school.

In her review *Impact of school libraries on student achievement* (ACER 2003) **Michelle Lonsdale** looked at a wide range of studies mostly from overseas.

She indicates that these studies have shown that school libraries can have a positive impact on student achievement - whether … measured in terms of reading scores, **literacy** or learning more generally- in the following key ways:

- a strong library program that is adequately staffed, resourced and funded can lead to higher student achievement regardless of socio-economic or educational levels of adults in the community
- a strong school computer network that connects the library's resources to the classroom has an impact on student achievement
- the quality of the library collection will affect student educational outcomes
- test scores are higher when school library usage is higher
- collaborative relationships between teachers and teacher-librarians have a significant impact on learning
- a print rich environment leads to more reading, and free voluntary reading is the best predictor of comprehension, vocabulary growth, spelling and grammatical ability and writing style
- integrating information literacy into the curriculum can improve students mastery of both content and information seeking skills

- libraries can make a positive difference to students self-esteem, confidence, independence and sense of responsibility towards their own learning

Lonsdale asks why the case for libraries still needs to be put. She suggests that it is difficult to measure the impact that teacher-librarians have. "Action research in school libraries then is a crucial tool for raising the profile of library professionals." (Lonsdale p.36)

She cites **Dr Ross Todd** as suggesting that evidence-based practice is fundamental in enabling teacher-librarians to show the tangible power of their contribution to a school's learning goals.

Action Research or Action Learning is a process that is used in the AIS NSW professional development. It involves:
- solving actual problems
- working with a team
- building a teacher's knowledge base
- reflection (making sense of evidence and experiences)

It is an **ideal** process for teacher-librarians to participate in with colleagues, in order to collectively examine and improve on educational outcomes in their school.

Teacher- librarians in this sector have used AGQTP grants to work with Dr Todd on such action research projects. Dr Todd (formerly of UTS Sydney now at Rutgers University -USA) has had a long association with the AIS NSW PD program for teacher-librarians. (Dr Todd's current project will be referred to later in this submission.)

His early work with teacher- librarians in this sector was based on embedding information skills into the curriculum, an essential part of the development of information literacy programs in schools.

Dr Todd's current research relates to inquiry learning, which is fundamental to building literacy in the wider context of 21st Century learning.

In a recent article Dr Todd (Scan Feb 2010) outlined his key findings as to what establishes a positive relationship between school libraries and student achievement:

- shared educational philosophies centred on inquiry learning
- systematic development of the students' information and critical literacy skills

- the development of students' information competence via flexible delivered classroom instruction, active reading programs that foster high levels of reading comprehension, vocabulary development and language skills
- library programs that set clear expectations and gather systematic feedback from students and teachers

Gary Hartzell (Emeritus Professor of Educational Administration-University of Nebraska) is an eminent American advocate for the teacher-librarians. He has presented at conferences in Australia.

"Principals should support school libraries because it is in both their students and their own best interest to do so. Quality library media programs can enhance student achievement….fifty years of research has shown…..that involved librarians can have a discernible positive impact regardless of student, school and community demographics." (Hartzell 2002)

Hartzell argues that the school leadership should support the school library and teacher-librarians through the budget, the encouragement of teacher collaboration with the teacher-librarians and the real embedding of information literacy and research skills.

Further he argues that the activities of school libraries are even more affective when the leadership role of teacher-librarians in the school is encouraged. Anecdotal evidence from AIS schools where teacher-librarians are head of departments would support this argument.

At the heart of the issue of libraries contributing to improved educational outcomes and community outcomes lies funding. If funding to schools is maintained so that every school can employ at least one qualified teacher–librarian, then school libraries will be able to fulfil their potential as 21st Century learning centres, where students are able to fully engage and fully benefit from their education to become citizens who contribute to their community.

TERM OF REFERENCE 3 : THE FACTORS INFLUENCING RECRUITMENT AND DEVELOPMENT OF SCHOOL LIBRARIANS

The NSW independent sector is a varied sector.

In the main, qualified teacher-librarians staff school libraries. Two factors affect the recruitment of teacher-librarians.

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- A decrease in the number of courses available for the training of teacher-librarians means that there has been a decline in the number of new teacher-librarians entering the profession.
- Secondly, as is the case with other members of the teaching profession, many teacher-librarians belong to the baby boomer demographic on the edge of retirement.

To reverse such trends would necessitate the funding of tertiary courses and (as in the past) the provision of scholarships to teachers and others interested in training as teacher-librarians.

The AIS NSW would welcome such provisions. It has previously collaborated with the University of Technology Sydney to facilitate courses undertaken by teacher- librarians to be counted towards a Masters Degree.

Earlier in this submission it has been pointed out that teacher-librarians in the independent sector have actively engaged in AIS professional development. Their participation in courses has been supported by their principals. They have also had the support of their principals when presenting at courses and conferences to showcase their work.

For nearly 20 years, the AIS PD program for teacher-librarians has had very strong participation rates. This indicates not only the high quality of the program, but also the fact that within this sector, there is an understanding that school libraries continue to change and that the only way to adapt to those changes, is to allow teacher-librarians the time to grow professionally and to network.

Networking is especially important for teacher-librarians' development, as in many schools there is only one teacher-librarian on the staff. The AIS NSW has promoted networking for teacher-librarians through meetings, newsletters and a listserv.

Today Web 2.0 technology and beyond facilitates professional development through wikis, blogs and podcasts. Such professional development is of great value to all, but especially to isolated community schools of which there are a number in this sector.

Professional development and networking facilitated by the AIS NSW has ranged widely, from university equivalent courses pertaining to information management and pedagogy to teacher-librarians engaging in spirited discussions with authors.

The domains with which teacher-librarians continue to concern themselves are those of teaching and learning, digital technology and of course literature.

The AIS PD program has on offer a wide range of courses teacher- librarians can attend. Below are listed just a few of the 2009 / 2010 options

- Educational leadership programs available through the Independent School Leadership Centre, in particular those aimed at middle managers and conferences such as "Leading the way in times of change"
- IT based courses such as:
    - Google and beyond for teacher-librarians
    - Using interactive whiteboards : beginning readers
    - Literacy goes digital
    - Storytelling with digital video
    - ipod, ilearn: podcasting for the classroom
    - Building basics with Dreamweaver
- Pastoral care courses such as those dealing with behaviour management
- Guided Inquiry : creating evidence of deep learning
- What's new for TLs : examining what the National Curriculum means for TLs
- The vampire myth: from Dracula to the Stephanie Myer's Twighlight series
- Planning for assessment in your school
- Creative problem solving
- Assessment in practice

Another example of the type of PD program that the AIS has been able to foster using AGQTP funds is the recent action research project which explored <u>Guided Inquiry as a process for pedagogical change</u>.

The grants enabled a group of 12 teacher-librarians to attend seminars and pool resources to work with Dr Ross Todd who provided the research base for the guided inquiry approach.

In the words of one participating teacher-librarian:

"To collaborate on a project with 11 other like minded teacher-librarians presented an opportunity to investigate and gather evidence to support the learning and teaching process of guided inquiry as a way of bringing about pedagogical change……….

Keeping our [school] community informed about the project was an important strategic move. Teacher discussions centred on the need for pedagogical change…….

In 2009, Guided Inquiry began again, as we look to improve on our experience and extend it to incorporate all classes in Year 7 and five teachers. Once again we will have an ACQTP grant as part of an AIS School based Action Learning Project. It will again be implemented

using a team teaching approach between the teacher-librarian and class teacher, collaborating at all stages of the guided inquiry process." (Sheerman 2009).

Another group of teacher-librarians makes a valuable contribution to the AIS PD program that is based on their own collaborative practice in well resourced schools.

These teacher-librarians present a module for New Scheme Teachers that exemplifies how they see their own role within their school in relation to classroom teachers. The module is <u>Sharing the load: developing a partnership with the teacher librarian</u> and covers some of the following:

- The essentials of a successful research task
- An assignment design process
- Knowledge sources
- Learning support materials including templates and scaffolds

Teaching this course offers these teacher-librarians another opportunity for promoting their own professional development and their educational leadership, but most importantly it provides beginning teachers with a window into the world of collaboration with teacher librarians.

Evaluations indicate that the beginning teachers value this input and for some it is their very first introduction as a teacher to the concept of critical information literacy.

There would undoubtedly be value in practicing teacher - librarians participating in the education of students in tertiary institutions who are studying to be teachers. This would not only be useful to the future students but an enriching experience for the teacher-librarian themselves.

What is worth stressing again in this context is that the perspective that teacher-librarians offer is cross curricular. They are in a position to work with students in all subjects areas, at different stages and see the students' achievements across the spectrum. This gives the teacher-librarian a perspective of students that is different to the classroom teacher. In those schools where the teacher-librarian successfully collaborates with other teaching staff, this perspective is valued.

TERM OF REFERENCE 5 : THE IMPACT AND POTENTIAL OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES TO ENHANCE AND SUPPORT THE ROLES OF SCHOOL LIBRARIES AND LIBRARIANS

The potential of digital technologies to enhance what went on in a school library began with the automation of catalogues a generation ago. Since that time school libraries have not looked back. The potential of digital technologies to continue to enhance the role of school libraries and thereby the teacher-librarian's role is ongoing and rapid.

It has been recently suggested that one of the issues that will face schools in the near future is the un-blocking of social networking sites. The Web 2.0 tools (blogs, wikis and podcasts) that are now used by many in schools, including the teacher – librarians, have only been available since 2004.Some examples of the way that Web 2.0 tools are used in school libraries to foster literacy skills include:

- Moderated blogs
- Moderated wikis
- Reading programs using Google sites
- Web tie-ins to fiction such as author sites and You tube clips of movies adapted from novels

The impact of collaborative tools has been enormous. One area that may need to be further addressed in the future, as technologies continue to evolve, is the assessment of student work that involves ever increasing collaborative content.

An important aspect of evolving technology is the debates that are taking place about the technology. Just as the teacher-librarian as an educator needs to keep abreast of what is happening in the field of pedagogy, they must also keep abreast of what is being said about technology and its impact on students.

Some of these debates are about ethics, some about problematic issues such as cyber-bullying and others relate to cognitive issues.

Examples of issues that teacher-librarians may have read about in Term1 2010 that may impact upon their work with students in the future are the following

- Baroness Greenfield the eminent British scientist claiming that children's experiences on social network sites are "*devoid of cohesive narrative and long term significance.*" She is a specialist in synaptic pharmacology and continues to research the impact of these technologies on the brain. (guardian.co.uk, 24/10/ 2009)

- A recent Stanford University experiment begins to cast doubts on multi-tasking skills of students….. *" the surprising result that heavy media multitaskers performed worse on a test of task-switching ability, likely due to reduced ability to filter out interference from the irrelevant task set." (Ophir,Nass & Wagner 2009)*

The past decade has without a doubt been the Google decade. It seemed to many students that all answers lay with Google.

The proliferation of information, the new formats, and the information that is increasingly hidden away in password protected databases make the role of the school library and the teacher-librarian more important than ever.

The teacher-librarian is uniquely placed not just to teach students to approach research using the guided inquiry method, but they are also the teachers in the school who have the specialist skills to find and manage the information that is hidden.

As the data online continues to proliferate school libraries can build valuable digital collections that are tailored to the needs of the students of a particular school. In the case of online information that has to be paid for before it can be accessed, it is school libraries that are set up to budget for such resources.

The issue of equity of access is also relevant. Increasingly valuable information is being packaged and edited and only made available at a cost.
School libraries can ensure equity of access to digital resources for all the students in their school. This can be through the purchase of subscriptions, or through networking with other libraries at local or state level. Here again it is ongoing funding from Government programs that will ensure equity of access for all students regardless of where they attend school.

Teacher librarians in school libraries that are innovative, remain in a position they have been in before - at the gateway not as the guardian of the barrier, but as the guide who can lead students and their colleagues through the 21st Century information maze.

Does 21st Century literacy look so very different from the information literacy of the late 20th Century because all school communities have to deal with Web 2.0 technology?

The answer is a resounding yes from the Australian research community. Ross Todd argues that we have reached a critical point. He points out that the 2009 ASLA statement on guided inquiry suggests that in an information driven environment without inquiry there is no reason for a school library. *"An instructional agenda targeted toward deep inquiry and knowledge*

development has to be the centrepiece of a transformed 21st century school library and the central dimension of the work of the teacher-librarian within it." (Todd May 2009)

Inquiry based programs allow students to:
- Apply critical thinking skills
- Build argument and establish evidence- based points of view and perspectives
- Generate meaningful conclusions and imaginative solutions
- Understand how to build and represent new knowledge in safe, ethical and responsible ways
- Develop skills in reflection and metacognition to build and verify knowledge
- Gain confidence and independence in their own learning (Foley & Hay 2009)

Hay (2006) indicates that her research in Australian school libraries shows that feeling comfortable with the library as a place and with library staff is fundamental to students' sense of achievement and motivation as learners.

She points out that her research has shown that "an effective library works with its learning community (including library committees and IT specialists) to build capacity to provide online and digital resources to support student learning and find new ways of connecting students. Such practices support the view that the 21st Century school library is a place for collaboration, creativity, interactivity and exploration both online and offline."

Many schools are still coming to terms with Web 2.0 technology. If teacher librarians continue to embrace changing technologies in the context of a rich and varied learning environment, they will ensure that their libraries remain relevant to the students and teaching community.

CONCLUSION

This inquiry into the role, adequacy and resourcing of school libraries and teacher librarians in Australia's public and private schools is timely because

- Many schools have opted to build or refurbish libraries under current government grants. This indicates that the community at large realizes how important school libraries are for the education of young Australians.

- Research indicates that libraries have the potential to contribute to educational outcomes. The aspect of learning outcomes that most teacher-librarians would be particularly committed to is literacy in a 21st century context which includes basic

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literacy, information and digital literacy. A strong library program that is part of a school's overall learning program will help to produce informed critical and hopefully cyber savvy citizens of the future.

- The ongoing professional development program for teacher-librarians under the auspices of the AIS NSW is testimony to the fact that government funds spent on professional development benefit not only the individual teacher-librarian but also their school community .The existence of AGQTP funds enables teacher-librarians to collaborate on action research projects with colleagues. Such projects can result in practical solutions to pedagogical or management issues within schools. Teacher-librarians who attend professional development courses at the AIS NSW show strong commitment to their profession and their role as teachers, as well as information managers.

- To ensure that we have enough teacher-librarians for the future programs may need to be put in place to attract younger people to the profession.

- Digital technologies continue to evolve. Technologies both enhance and support what happens in school libraries. Teacher librarians are in some schools at the forefront of adapting Web 2.0 technology for educational purposes. The other side of the coin is that digital technologies bring with them issues that need to be addressed by the entire school community such as cyber-safety. Teacher-librarians are well placed within schools not just to build and mediate digital collections, but to collaborate with their colleagues to harness the potential of new technologies for the benefit of all the students.

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CONTACT

For further enquiries or additional information relating to this submission please contact:

Julie Thompson

Director of Professional Development

The Association of Independent Schools of NSW

Level 12, 99 York Street

SYDNEY NSW 2000