



Dear Committee members,

Research shows that having suitably qualified staff in school libraries improves student outcomes across a range of subject areas. More detailed information to support this is provided in the attached letter from ALIA (Australian Library and Information Association).

My own personal experience and observations supports the assertion that information literacy skills should be directly taught by qualified staff to ensure students have the skills they will need for higher level study.

I graduated with a Graduate Diploma of Arts (Information Management / Librarianship) in 1997 and worked for three years in public and special libraries before moving into school libraries after I completed my Graduate Diploma of Education (Primary) in 1999. This means I am a qualified librarian, qualified primary teacher and qualified teacher-librarian.

In over a decade since becoming a qualified teacher librarian I have only gained employment in this field at 2 schools (one being a private school where I only had 4 hours a week allocated to taking classes in the library and the rest of my time was spent in all other areas of the school). The only true teacher librarian position I have had was at a well resourced state primary school (a very rare thing these days). In this position I taught library classes to each grade as well as managing the library. I was able to see a marked improvement in students' information literacy skills and reading abilities in just 6 months that I was there. I conducted structured lessons and assessment whilst classroom teachers were able to use this time for their own preparation and marking. The students enjoyed coming to the library and parents saw the value in these important lessons. However this model is, unfortunately, very rare in Australian schools these days due to lack of funding. Schools need to choose between having qualified library staff or having a Physical Education teacher or Music teacher and unfortunately libraries often miss out.

I have spent 5 and a half years employed at library technician level in school libraries as there was no funding to employ me as a teacher librarian. Although I had the skills to assist students and teachers in literacy education I had limited opportunity due to my role.

In one Melbourne state secondary school I worked with a teacher librarian but she had only 2 hours a week to manage the library and no time allocated to take library classes – she taught English, SOSE and Health as there was no funding to pay her to teach important information literacy skills. I organized to team-teach Information Literacy skills with year 7 and 8 English teachers to ensure students were taught these important skills. I did this as an additional duty above my job requirements because it is something I feel very passionate about. I had observed teachers attempting to teach “research” classes to students and felt frustrated that the teachers own limited library experience meant they were unable to teach students how to effectively find relevant information through a variety of sources. The year 7 and 8 students came from primary schools with small libraries and unqualified staff and thus had no understanding of how to “use” a library. I was able to teach them how to use print, electronic and audio-visual material successfully. I taught them how to locate and then evaluate different information sources. Students learnt that research is not simply a case of “googling” it.

However in most schools that I have encountered library staff are unqualified or have minimal library qualifications and no teaching qualifications. Although these staff members may be passionate about helping students, their lack of education means the students are not receiving the best support. Qualified Library Technicians should be the absolute minimum employed in school libraries and these technicians should be provided with additional training and support to provide the extra specialized skills required to provide a quality school library service.

Inquiry into School Libraries and Teacher Librarians in Australia

Worst of all, many primary schools do not employ library staff at all. Their school libraries are managed completely by parent volunteers. I also know of two schools which have no library and simply encourage students to use the local public library. Although public library staff are trained to support all members of the community they do not have the time to teach children the step-by-step process of how to locate and evaluate suitable information and students accessing resources from these libraries are most likely having library staff locate the information for them.

This government continues to push for people to pursue education beyond year 10. To study effectively at these higher levels students must be information literate. This means they must be directly taught these skills by qualified staff, preferably teacher librarians.

Even people not pursuing further education benefit from being confident and competent self-directed learners who know how to find whatever information they require to perform their jobs, conduct their business or organize their own personal affairs (whether that be finding out their rights regarding faulty workmanship by trades people or learning how to manage their investments etc).

Teacher librarians assist in teaching students to read, however they also teach them how to research effectively, how to use the Internet safely and appropriately, and they support teachers by finding the most relevant resources to support teachers in their classrooms. Teacher librarians often run information or training sessions for teachers on new materials, new programs and new instructional techniques to assist students. Teacher librarians are an asset to schools on so many levels.

There are many qualified teacher librarians currently working as librarians or as classroom teachers because there is no funding available to employ them in roles which would make the most use of their skills. Please rectify this.

The recent government funding to build school libraries is a big step in the right direction but it will prove pointless if those libraries are not adequately funded and staffed.

I implore you to stand up for our children's education and ensure school libraries are adequately funded to employ qualified staff.

I look forward to hearing the results of the Federal Inquiry into school libraries and teacher librarians in Australian schools.

Yours Sincerely

Loretta Kelly

Attachment 1 – ALIA letter

Dear Ms Catherine King,

I am writing to ask for your support for the principle of a teacher librarian in every school and for proper funding for school libraries across Australia.

In Ballarat we no longer have a qualified library professional in all our primary and secondary schools and this is a cause for serious concern.

The ability to read is a major factor in determining whether a child will succeed or fail in our education system, and later on in the workplace. We need to ensure that our children have the best beginning – a literate start in life.

Teachers (and parents) encourage reading for very young children, but in secondary schools, reading is no longer a subject in its own right. The only people who focus on this vital area of a child's development are librarians. And yet many Australian schools, under tight budget constraints, say they cannot afford to employ qualified library staff.

What is the use of the Government investing millions of dollars in new library buildings if there are no new books to entice children in, and no teacher librarians to support a reading culture?

A study completed by Edith Cowan University and published in May 2009 suggested that 50% of school libraries in Australia had to manage on less than \$10,000 a year for new materials, while teacher librarians (where they were still employed by schools), were under pressure to spend more time outside the school library.

The development of literacy skills is crucial for students' future participation in the Australian economy and society. Teacher librarians are instrumental in supporting this important goal. The Australian Bureau of Statistics' report *Adult literacy and life skills survey* (ABS 4228.0, 2006), found that slightly less than half of the Australian population, approximately 7 million, failed to achieve the minimum required level or higher in prose and document literacy.

There is much research evidence that students attain higher levels of achievement when there is an adequately resourced school library staffed by a teacher librarian.

Existing research shows that school libraries can have a positive impact, whether measured in terms of reading scores, literacy or learning more generally, on student achievement. There is evidence to show that a strong library program that is adequately staff, resourced and funded can lead to higher student achievement regardless of the socioeconomic or educational levels of the adults in the community.

Lonsdale, M 2003, *Impact of school libraries on student achievement: a review of the research, report for the Australian School Library Association*, ACER, Camberwell, Vic., p. 27.

Teacher librarians are at the forefront of teaching essential information and digital literacy skills in our schools. The successful implementation and use of the national broadband network depends upon Australians having these skills. The development of information literacy skills -- seeking, evaluating, using and creating information effectively to achieve personal, social, occupational and educational goals – is essential to Australia's long-term economic development.

Inquiry into School Libraries and Teacher Librarians in Australia

Teaching young Australians about cybersafety and the important messages about how to stay safe online, particularly with the growth of social networking, is one of the most effective ways of protecting our children. Teacher librarians are key to cybersafety education programs in schools.

I urge the Government to recognise the vital role of school libraries and teacher librarians, particularly in the areas of literacy, lifelong learning, cybersafety, information literacy, and digital literacy skills. Adequate funding together with educational and professional development opportunities are essential to achieve the best educational and social outcomes for young Australians.

The House Standing Committee on Education and Training is currently conducting an *Inquiry into school libraries and teacher librarians in Australian schools* and I would be grateful if you could add your voice to ours in calling for the Federal Government to adopt the principle of 'a teacher librarian in every school'.

Further information about school libraries and teacher librarians is available here <http://www.alia.org.au/schoollibraries>.

I look forward to hearing your thoughts on this matter.

Kind regards

Loretta Kelly