



Joint Statement on School Libraries

Well-resourced school libraries staffed by qualified library professionals are essential to rebuild the literacy levels of Australian students and achieve an appropriate level of reading competency. School libraries are necessary to create safe, confident users of online content and ensure that young people are media literate.

In our knowledge economy, these literacies are a vital component of a world class education, and they fall within the remit of the school library. Research shows a strong correlation between the presence of a qualified teacher librarian in an accessible well-resourced school library and higher levels of student achievement.

The severe decline in the number of qualified teacher librarians staffing school libraries, in the number of teacher librarian training programs, in school library funding, and in centralised school library services and policy advisers over the last several decades is incompatible with this important educational outcome.

Despite the demonstrated importance of teacher librarians, other qualified staff and libraries, library services have been seriously affected by funding cuts, budget constraints and changing staffing policies and practices. This has undermined the capacity and quality of library services provided by schools; library staffing, resources, services, equipment and facilities.

The systemic devolution of aspects of decision making and financial management to the local level means that funding for school libraries relies on the resource allocation priorities established at that level, which might or might not place a high priority on the need for a well-staffed library service.

The failure of governments to prioritise the provision of funding and staffing for school libraries has led to marked differences between schools where this is at the discretion of the individual school and is often subject to competing budgetary demands within schools. Data available indicates that many school libraries have budgets well below the amount that would allow the resource collection to be maintained.

The provision of school library services in Australia is ad hoc. Access to qualified staff, a well-developed collection of resources, physical facilities and infrastructure is inequitable.

Without an appropriate funding formula and guidelines for school libraries, the existing inequitable funding arrangements will continue. This will increase the marginalisation of some libraries through underfunding and neglect, while others are prioritised within their schools. All schools should be able to provide quality print and electronic resources as well as access to emerging technologies. This is a basic requirement for any school library and should be the norm rather than the exception.

Such marked differences between schools are incompatible with the stated commitment of governments to provide a world class quality education for every Australian child.

We call on the commonwealth, state and territory governments to ensure equitable access to appropriately funded and well-resourced school libraries, enhanced by the services of fully qualified teacher librarians and other library professionals. Such investment is fundamentally important to all school communities, benefitting all students with increased literacy levels and the achievement of a world class education.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Viv Barton".

Viv Barton
President
Australian Library and Information Assn
November 2020

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Margo Pickworth".

Margo Pickworth
President
Australian School Library Assn

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Correna Haythorpe".

Correna Haythorpe
Federal President
Australian Education Union