



*Linking Catholic school libraries across Victoria*

Committee Secretary  
Standing Committee on Education and Training  
PO Box 6021  
House of Representatives  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600  
AUSTRALIA

**Inquiry into school libraries and teacher librarians in Australian schools**

**A submission from the Victorian Catholic Teacher Librarians network**

April 2010

The Victorian Catholic Teacher Librarians (VCTL) is a voluntary network established in 2004 in response to the Catholic Education Offices of Melbourne and Sale's decision to withdraw all library services including the redundancy of its library advisors.

The VCTL's main aim is to support school Catholic school libraries and their specialist staff by maintaining existing zone networks across the Catholic sector and offering support and collegiality to those working in Victorian Catholic schools.

The VCTL operates under the auspices of the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) Schools group, ALIA Schools.

This submission reflects the Victorian Catholic Teacher Librarians (VCTL) position regarding the Australian Federal Government's Inquiry into school libraries and teacher librarians in Australian schools. It aims to address the terms of reference from the perspective of Victorian Catholic Schools.

*Reference point 1: The impact of recent policies and investments on school libraries and their activities*

The Government's Building Education Revolution (BER) has seen a significant upgrade in Catholic school library buildings. The BER however, fails to acknowledge issues relating to professional staff:

- Who have the knowledge and capabilities to organise and maintain the library's physical and virtual spaces;

- Who provide equitable access to a range of current and relevant resources catering for different reading abilities and interests, curriculum areas and learning styles;
- Who develop and deliver curriculum collaboratively with teachers, integrating a range of resources such as online, print and audio; and
- Who can provide access to quality virtual resources for curriculum programs

There are no current directives regarding staffing Catholic School libraries from the Catholic Education Commission of Victoria. Prior to 2004, School Library policies existed. These policies provided standards for best practice as reflected in current National library documents such as *Learning for the future*. Yearly surveys on library activities were conducted, collated and disseminated to all schools. These surveys were invaluable to all Catholic schools, especially for principals as they provided information about how well their libraries compare with like schools. Since this practice has ceased, principals have very little information to go on regarding the potential or otherwise of a well resourced and well staffed school library.

*Reference point 2: The potential of school libraries and librarians to contribute to improve educational and community outcomes, especially literacy*

The VCTL believes that all Catholic School libraries must be managed and directed by qualified Teacher Librarians. Teacher Librarians (TLs) have a teaching qualification plus experience in the classroom, as well as qualifications in librarianship. As trained teachers TLs are able to:

- Communicate and design curriculum programs with teachers which incorporate a range of resource formats;
- Fulfil the duty of care requirements as stated in the Education Act. This includes providing before and after school and lunchtime access to library services.

As Information Specialists, TLs:

- Provide access quality digital resources which support curriculum and student learning outcomes;
- Design programs, which educate students in effective, efficient and appropriate use of digital resources.

As Literacy and Literature Specialists, TLs:

- Have a sound knowledge of how texts work and know how to impart this knowledge to teachers and students;
- Understand the theoretical frameworks that underpin literacy and literature development and how this relates to today's student; and
- Understand the importance of providing a broad and diverse range of texts that reflect the interests and purposes of students as they read for pleasure and information.

Currently, there are very few qualified TLs operating in Catholic schools especially in the primary sector. Therefore, only some schools have access to the services of a professional who can deliver the above knowledge and skills. The VCTL sees this as a social justice issue. It is evident through zone reports that there are gross inequities between school libraries that are operating at full capacity to deliver quality information literacy, literature programs and up-to-date resources and those school libraries that have either antiquated or limited resources available to their students.

*Reference point 3: The factors influencing recruitment and development of school librarians*

The VCTL has major concerns regarding the following:

- There is an increasing shortage of qualified TLs in Catholic Schools, especially in the primary sector. Where TLs are employed their knowledge and skills are undervalued or at best misunderstood due to lack of information from a school-based perspective such as from principals, up to a system's based perspective such as the Catholic Education Office Melbourne.
- We are concerned that the limited opportunities for teachers to gain qualifications as a TL in Victoria impacts on their willingness to undertake further study in this area. Many are not prepared to enrol in interstate courses. Prior to 2004 support from the Catholic Education Sector for those undertaking courses in Teacher Librarianship was provided by way of paid study leave. Professional development was also offered including a course in basic librarianship for teachers who were not TLs. This course helped to address the need for a number of schools that were not in a position to employ a TL or more importantly *access* qualified TLs. Currently, there are school libraries which are run by untrained teachers, school officers and in some cases, parents.

*Reference point 4: The role of the different levels of government and local communities and other institutions in partnering with and supporting school librarians*

The VCTL believes that the School Library and the TL are integral to the information flow between the various levels of government and other institutions within the school community. For example,

- School Libraries are the first port of call for many parents, students, and teachers and in the Catholic sector, the Parish community for advice on projects, homework and availability of resources. TLs who operate within a highly proactive professional community, creates the necessary links between the local library, local council and other important institutions such as the National Gallery, Museum, etc. providing the whole school community with vicarious resources and experiences.

- Many educational resources from the government and other foundations such as The MS Readathon, The Heart Foundation etc. are often sent to the school addressed to the Librarian. It is the TL who has a sound understanding of how the curriculum works and knows how best these (often free resources) can be optimised and used to engage student learning.
- The TL understands that library collections must reflect the ever-increasing culturally diverse world that today's student lives in.

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

The VCTL believes that it is the TL who provides:

- Specialist knowledge, support and professional development training for staff in how to use and embed digital technologies into curriculum;
- The management of technologies for equitable access;
- The infrastructure and policy development required for acceptable and appropriate use of a wide range of digital resources and technologies, including cyber bullying, privacy, identity theft and security of information;
- The educational rationale for the effective inclusion of digital technologies in the curriculum;
- Equal access to a range of digital resources and delivery formats which support the development of high quality literacy programs in schools.

### **Recommendations:**

The VCTL recommends as follows:

1. Schools that received BER funding to upgrade libraries should be encouraged to have a Teacher Librarian as part of the staffing of the upgraded library.
2. That schools be funded for qualified Teacher Librarians at a level of staffing similar to *Libraries of the future* recommendations. The school would not receive this funding if the teacher allocated to the library is not qualified as a Teacher Librarian or is not undertaking study to gain such a qualification.
3. Teachers who, as part of their workload, are allocated to the library are encouraged to undertake studies in Teacher Librarianship. This may include financial support such as study leave replacement costs, contribution towards the costs of undertaking a course to gain Teacher Librarian qualifications.

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