



Dromkeen
Children's
Literature Collection

Inquiry into school libraries and teacher librarians in Australian schools

As one of Victoria's most significant educational excursion venues within The Arts, English and History areas, Dromkeen is delighted to see a Parliamentary Committee Inquiry into school libraries and teacher librarians in Australian schools.

Dromkeen overview and why appropriate for Dromkeen to present to the Committee

The Dromkeen Children's Literature Collection is a unique collection of original illustrations, artwork and manuscripts from Australian children's literature, but particularly children's picture books. Importantly, The Collection includes not only original finished illustrations and artwork, but also sketches, preliminary artwork, diagrams and dummies of books revealing the complex creative journeys that authors, illustrators and publishers take in producing children's picture books. Valued at over one million dollars and consisting of nearly 7,000 pieces, the Dromkeen Collection is the most valuable and significant of its kind in Australia, and in the world.

True to its purpose, an extensive array of structured and unstructured educational programs and activities has been built around the display. Dromkeen programs and activities provide a rich educational resource to pre-school, primary, secondary and tertiary students, particularly from educational, literacy or visual arts/graphics courses and educators including teachers, teacher librarians, lecturers and other academics.

Concerns relating to libraries and teacher librarians in Australian schools

Pre-service training in literature

- Lack of librarian or teacher librarian pre-service training has seen a major drop in awareness of literature and library resources

In the past almost all students undertook a visit to Dromkeen as part of their teacher training. The past few years no such visits have been part of teacher education.

- Teacher/school visits to resource centres.

25 years ago when I commenced as Director at Dromkeen we averaged one or two professional development days per week for a whole school staff with the express focus of literature across all grade levels and the curriculum areas.

The past five years have seen a dramatic drop in these. Almost no visits.

School student visits

School student visits to Dromkeen sadly demonstrate teachers lack of knowledge of picture books and novels – other than perhaps a limited range of prescribed classroom reading.

In recent years it is typical to see a situation where the teacher or librarian who might have originally organised for the school visit has now left the school and those in charge of the visit often see this as simply an 'outing'. Most are excited, enthused and surprised at the educational possibilities of use of the picture book following such a visit.

Such comments as "we have no idea whether these books are in our libraries" are a sad indictment of our school library system.

Dromkeen Librarian's Award

Since 1994, Dromkeen has presented a national librarian's award with the aim of recognising this most critical role within our schools and society.

In 1994, at the first Dromkeen Literary Luncheon the inaugural Dromkeen Librarian's Award went to Suzette Boyd, Librarian of Scotch College in Melbourne. It was the beginning of a new chapter at Dromkeen, whereby recognition was given to the library profession in the form of an award specifically presented to a teacher, a teacher librarian, or a children's librarian, working within or outside the education system. It also recognised the important role played by librarians in introducing children to literature and encouraging enjoyment and love of reading.

In recent years the committee has had a real challenge working within the schools system. Many schools "noting we no longer have a librarian but 'so and so' does a fantastic job".

The Dromkeen Librarian's Award now does not require a person to be a trained librarian but rather a person who brings books and children together.

New buildings are but one aspect – appropriately trained librarians enable the library hub to be effective.

On behalf of Dromkeen National Centre for Picture Book Art, I commend the Government's initiative in an inquiry into school libraries and teacher librarians in Australian schools.

Kaye Keck
Director
Dromkeen National Centre for Picture Book Art