

## **Inquiry into school libraries and teacher librarians in Australian Schools**

My name is Sandra Hails and I am a teacher/librarian at Singleton Heights P.S., a NSW state school of approximately six hundred students. I was a classroom teacher [K-6], for twenty-six years and this is my fifth year in the library position, which I applied for when I completed my Masters of Education in Teacher Librarianship in 2005.

In my teaching career, I have seen many changes in policy, investment, school infrastructure, educational outcomes and technological advances, all of which impact on students learning, however it is the recent challenges that face teacher/librarians and school libraries that is causing me the most concern. I am very pleased to be able to voice my concerns to your inquiry.

The role of teacher/librarian is an important one within an education institution because it represents the pivotal point around which the student outcomes, curriculum resources and classroom teaching/learning practices rotate. Teacher/librarians are placed where they can purchase and provide the relevant resources and provide the professional technical skills needed to assist classroom teachers to achieve the desired student outcomes. It is this broad overview, unique to teacher/librarians, that needs to exist in a K-6 or 7-12 school, and that ensures the progression of student learning.

In recent years in NSW state schools there has been a change in the way schools think which has more to do with budgets than it does with student achievement. Whilst always desiring student achievement, it has become more obvious that budget constraints are beginning to impinge on the way schools work on a day-to-day, year-to-year basis, and that without parameters set by governments there develops an inequality between schools. The following points show the ways in which practices have changed within my school in recent years and which I am sure are replicated in other schools across the state.

- Library has become part of the RFF component rather than the librarian working co-operatively with classroom teachers in a team-teaching library lesson. This fails to maximise the teacher/pupil ratio and the expertise of both librarian and classroom teacher.
- Library budget has decreased each year from \$10,000 in 2006 to \$4,500 in 2010, although the budget has still to provide adequately for the same number of students, staff and curriculum resource requirements. Sadly the cost of resources and the materials needed to process them has continued to increase.
- Whilst there has been an increase in the technology used in schools over recent years there is an inequality in their implementation in real terms, in many schools. The use of the internet, laptops, interactive whiteboards and social networking such as blogs and wikis, is difficult for the library in my school to implement, as there are no computers within the library that are capable of performing these tasks for a class of students. There is a bank of six computers, the oldest in the school, for any Internet search work during library lessons. Without adequate training by the

librarian, students cannot access the most accurate, relevant and recent information needed for their assignments. Teaching students to think creatively and critically is vitally important to for their future learning.

- Teaching students to infer, interpret and synthesise information has been a long-standing strength in the teacher/librarian's approach to student learning and one that can be passed on to classroom teachers as professional development but there is less time in schools to be able to do in-house training when the curriculum is as crowded as it has become.
- The allocation of administration time and clerical time has decreased so that the smooth running of library services is adversely affected. This time is at a principal's discretion and varies from school to school.
- The teaching and development of *a love of literature* in all students has long term benefits for the development of literacy skills, the adoption of core values and their commitment to their community, and their life long learning that cannot be instilled without the training and dedication of a teacher/librarian.

In submitting to you the particulars of my teacher/librarian position I am hoping that it will add to the body of evidence you collect, and ensure that you achieve a sound understanding of just what is occurring in school libraries and how it is impacting on students, staff and in particular teacher/librarians.

It is a rewarding and personally fulfilling role that I perform each day for the benefit of my students. My hope is that the school library and the teacher/librarian will continue to be a valued and vital role for schools in the future.

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