



16 November 2020

Submission for the Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs regarding Petition No. 174

The Western Australian School Library Association (WASLA) conducted a survey earlier in the year of all Department of Education personnel who have been identified by HRMIS (Human Resource Management Information System) as Teacher – Library Services. This was a result of the Department of Education's response to the Hon Donna Faragher's MLC tabled question to the LC Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations (2019) on how many qualified teacher librarians are in public and primary schools. The Minister of Education reported back that there were 56 teachers employed in the position of Teacher – Library Services.

WASLA contacted those 56 people and had a 100% response rate. Our findings are as follows:

- Out of 812 public schools in WA there are only 29.6 FTE Teacher Librarians (TLs) working in a school library role. None of them worked in primary schools. Three regional and remote schools had employed qualified teacher librarians. (In our petition we gave a 10 FTE greater allowance buffer to account for any TLs who might be identified on HRMIS by another title).
- There are now only 33 of the entire 812 public schools who employ teachers in a library role. In those schools 38 employees have specialised TL university qualifications. Of these employees, two staff have TL qualifications but are only employed as School Librarians (not as a teacher and therefore paid much less).
- 18 qualified TLs work between 0.8 and 1.0 FTE in a school library role. 20 work a fraction of 0.6 and 0.1 FTE in the school library.
- Five schools recently had their qualified TL out of the library and now have Library Officers or Teachers (without a Library qualification) managing their school libraries.

This erosion of qualified school library staff is a trend that is rapidly happening throughout the nation.¹ Of recent, as President of WASLA, I am increasingly being contacted by school library staff from across the metropolitan area who are informing me that their positions are being dramatically reduced or eliminated; that Library Officers are expected to take on the duties of teachers; and, that libraries are closed to students due to inappropriate or lack of staffing.

Why is this a concerning trend? A growing amount of research over the last 30 years, both locally and internationally, has shown a close correlation between high quality library programs, delivered by qualified TLs, and student achievements. Schools with strong library programs do better in standardised tests, such as NAPLAN, as students' literacy skills improve through targeted reading strategies.²

¹ Godfree, H. and Neilson, O. (2018). *School Libraries Matter!* The missing piece in the education puzzle*.

[online] *Students Need School Libraries*. Available at: <https://studentsneedschoollibraries.org.au/wp-content/uploads/Holly-Godfree-and-Olivia-Neilson-ACCESS-March-2018-editors-note.pdf> [Accessed 16 Nov. 2020].

² Lance, K.C. and Kachel, D.E. (2018). Why school librarians matter: What years of research tell us. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 99(7), pp.15–20.

What else do TLs and a strong library team offer a school:³

- They enhance digital and information literacy, resource the curriculum and help students become critical, creative and collaborative thinkers.
- They help students and teachers to efficiently locate reliable, authoritative and meaningful resources in an information-abundant world.
- Their broad overview of the curriculum enables them to provide targeted differentiation and resourcing support to staff, students and parents.
- TLs carefully select and organise physical and digital resources to personalise their school's collection for their community.
- They collaborate across schools, sectors and systems and use personal learning networks to connect with and build professional relationships with experts in Australia and around the world in a range of curriculum areas.
- They provide a safe-haven in the library that supports student wellbeing.
- They create personalised, effective metadata to save time and energy for users when searching for resources.
- They personalise their services to the needs of:
 - the new as well as the experienced teacher
 - the keen and the reluctant reader⁴
 - the skilled and the overwhelmed learner
 - individuals, teams, and groups across the school community.

Schools that invest in well-staffed school libraries reap the benefits of quality services and resourcing, ensuring their staff and students are best equipped for the digital age. TLs can only operate at their highest level if they are supported by library support staff (library technician or library officer). A well-run library requires work to be done at a variety of levels, and only when the ongoing operational levels are taken care of can the TL provide the full suite of library services. Unfortunately, as our research is showing, school leadership teams are choosing to not have a fully functioning school library team.

We therefore ask the Legislative Council to further investigate the matter of school library staffing with the ultimate aim to provide guaranteed equitable access to a dynamic, well-resourced library including access to a qualified teacher librarian **AND** a library technician or library officer.

Kind regards,

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³ ACT Government, Education (2019). *School Libraries: The heart of 21st century learning*. [online] ACT Government: Education. Available at: https://www.education.act.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0007/1435435/School-Libraries-The-Heart-of-21st-Century-Learning.pdf [Accessed 16 Nov. 2020].

⁴ Merga, M.K. (2019). How do librarians in schools support struggling readers? *English in Education*, [online] 53(2), pp.145–160. Available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/04250494.2018.1558030> [Accessed 16 Nov. 2020].