

## Media release content



### POSITION STATEMENT ON THE STATUS OF SCHOOL LIBRARIES IN NSW SCHOOLS

The mission of the School Library Association of New South Wales to promote the professional interests of teacher librarians and support staff in school libraries is underpinned by the belief that a well-resourced school library staffed by qualified professionals and paraprofessionals can make a difference in the lives of young people.

As intellectual spaces with an information-to-knowledge function, school libraries have been positively linked to students' academic achievement through the facilitation of 21st century skills, such as critical and creative thinking, literacy, and digital competencies (Dix et al., 2020; Gretes, 2013; Hay & Todd, 2010; Hughes, 2013; Lance & Maniotes, 2020; Merga, 2019). Furthermore, decades of research indicate that well-resourced school libraries with qualified staff enable students and teachers to keep abreast of, and be competent in, rapid developments in technology and the ways in which information is accessed, processed, and communicated (Lance & Kachel, 2018; Lance & Schwarz, 2012; Lonsdale, 2003). More recently, well-resourced and staffed school libraries have also proven themselves beacons of social justice by providing equity of access to resources, and through facilitation of students' ethical and intercultural understanding and the promotion of personal and social capabilities (Hay & Todd, 2010; Merga, 2020).

The core services of the school library require the knowledge and expertise of a qualified teacher librarian to oversee collection development, collaborate with teachers in curriculum planning, teach information/digital literacies and inquiry skills, and provide reader advisory services (ASLA/ALIA, 2016). Research indicates that these services are enhanced when the teacher librarian is supported by other professionals and paraprofessionals with library-related qualifications (Dix et al., 2020).

Despite evidence highlighting the value of school libraries with qualified staff and significant investment over the last decade in both the building of school libraries during the Building the Education Revolution (BER) program and the upgrade of library management systems in some 2,200 government school libraries (Softlink, 2020), strong anecdotal evidence from teacher librarians paints a current picture of severe funding challenges for many school libraries in New South Wales and a declining number of positions for qualified teacher librarians (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Employment, 2011). It appears that, under the NSW Department of Education and Communities' (2013)

“Local Schools, Local Decisions” (LSLD) agenda, teacher librarian positions have been progressively removed or the positions filled by non-qualified staff. For example, Weldon’s (2016) analysis of national datasets from the *Staff in Australia’s Schools (SIAS)* surveys across 2007-2013 concluded that teachers in a library role with no tertiary education in the library field remain high (40 per cent of primary teachers and 27 per cent of secondary teachers).

The issue for SLANSW and other advocates for well-resourced libraries with qualified staff is that the status of school library provisioning and school library staffing in NSW schools across all sectors remains unclear. This exemplifies the yet-to-be fully resolved national issue regarding a lack of hard data highlighted a decade ago in the Parliamentary Inquiry into School libraries and Teacher Librarians in 21st century Australia (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Employment, 2011):

It strikes the Committee that there is a fundamental need to collate some hard data to ascertain how many teacher librarians there are in Australia’s primary and secondary schools; to identify where the gaps are; and to start to extrapolate the links between library programs, literacy (especially digital literacy, which is as important as regular literacy and numeracy skills), and student achievement. (p. 118)

A recent full census of school libraries and staffing commissioned by the School Library Association of South Australia (Dix et al., 2020), sought to address the absence of hard data regarding school libraries in South Australia. Significant findings of this study include:

- 94% of schools have someone to manage the library collection and to select resources, but in just 23% of schools the person in this role is a qualified teacher librarian.
- 51% of staff managing South Australian school libraries are not library-qualified, and 36% of staff are paraprofessionals with neither teaching nor library qualifications.
- Schools with a qualified teacher librarian are more likely to have improved student literacy outcomes - using NAPLAN 2018 data, students’ reading, writing, spelling, grammar and punctuation outcomes at Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 were found to be significantly associated with the qualification-level of the person who manages the library.
- Students in schools with a qualified teacher librarian had up to two month’s learning gain, compared to students in schools with no staff member managing the library, taking into account the effect of socio-economic status.
- 22% of schools reported that their dedicated library space had been permanently encroached upon and repurposed, mainly due to STEM and digital learning, additional classroom space, additional staff office space, wellbeing counselling rooms, or downsizing.

The findings from this full census provides an accurate, current, and concerning picture of school libraries and staffing in South Australia.

SLANSW believes similar research is urgently needed to gain a comprehensive understanding of the current status of school library provisioning and staffing issues in New South Wales schools. Given NSW

has the greatest number of schools of any state or territory in Australia, we believe such a census could provide the teacher librarian profession, school communities, education unions and the Government with definitive evidence of the status of school libraries across all education systems within the state. The results of such a census, in conjunction with compelling research on the benefits of school libraries, could be used to inform the development of future policy, programs and initiatives of SLANSW and other professional associations, individual schools, education systems, unions, and tertiary institutions who service and support school libraries and library staff in NSW schools.

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The [School Library Association of New South Wales](https://www.slansw.net.au) (SLANSW) is a professional association centered on professional learning, advocacy and research. Our membership is interested in learning about, and supporting and advocating for, the importance of school libraries as a part of the K-12 educational experience.

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