

**Tasmanian School Library Response
to the Public Consultation Paper of the
Independent Review of Education in Tasmania
by Vicki Baylis**

*This is a joint response from
the Australian School Library Association
and
the Australian Library and Information Association*

Australian School Library Association (ASLA)

– Marc Mumford (Board Member), Head of Libraries at Calvin Christian School

Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA)

– Jaqui Lucas (Professional Learning Teacher Librarian)

Dawn Clarke – Library Technician at Exeter Primary School

Anna Davidson – Teacher Librarian at Hutchins

David Morris – Teacher Librarian and Head L&IS at Scotch Oakburn College

Katie Thompson – Senior Library Technician at Hobart City High School

Jo Wolfe – Library Technician at Claremont College

Introduction

We draw your attention to the critical shortage of qualified library staff in Tasmanian schools and seek your support to increase the number of qualified staff, and increase resource funding in school libraries.

The provision of post-graduate and professionally qualified library staff in Tasmanian schools has historically been a critical part of the pedagogical support infrastructure for classroom teachers and students in Tasmanian schools and colleges. The provision of school libraries properly curated and managed by professionally qualified staff has also been a critical part of producing successful academic outcomes across primary and secondary education in Tasmania.

One of the hallmarks of a quality literacy program is the opportunity for students to exercise their own agency and choose resources that engage with their own interests at every level of their literacy journey. School libraries are a very efficient way of meeting this need in cities, in rural and remote areas even more so.

Throughout this document we will refer to a well-resourced school library. A well-resourced school library can hold many thousands of curated physical resources and provide secure access to curated digital resources across a wide range of interests and reading-skill levels which can be shared across the whole school community. The school library staffing will be headed by a qualified teacher librarian, with in-depth knowledge of those resources, capable of providing personalised recommendations to each individual member of the school community. The well-resourced school library will be staffed by people who are helpful and capable of fostering a protected, welcoming, wellbeing space. Such a library will contain staff members, and books that will inspire students, books to take home to read, maybe even under their blankets at night.

A great example of a Tasmanian school library doing what it can with the resources available is that at Dodges Ferry Primary School. Library Technician Sallie Clarke was awarded the 2023 ASLA (Australian School Library Association) Library Advocate Award. In 2023 Sallie lent 37,000 books to the school's 558 students, an average of 66 books per student, in just one year! How many of those students would not have read a single book at home, and not gained that much practice without that school library and Sallie? We have included Sallie's 2023 library report as an appendix.

Recommendations

1. As a matter of equity and essential education infrastructure, a target that every Tasmanian public school student has access to a well-resourced and curated onsite school library and related information services run by professionally qualified staff.
2. That the Tasmanian Department for Education, Children and Young People (DECYP) develop a publicly available central register of the provision, resourcing, and staffing of school libraries to provide a source of data to track impact on literacy, numeracy, and wellbeing outcomes. This would see the Tasmanian Government take a national lead in this educational initiative. The State Library of Tasmania is ideally situated to provide this service as it already provides the library information management system to State schools.
3. Expansion of training initiatives. This could include scholarship programs for currently qualified teachers and librarians to become teacher librarians, supplemented by opportunities for library-specific training for currently unqualified educational support staff.
4. That DECYP adopt a policy of recruiting professionally qualified library staff to work in school libraries. This would mean people with higher education qualifications accredited by ALIA as teacher librarians, librarians and TAFE qualifications accredited by ALIA for library technicians. Right now there is no such commitment.
5. Implement a centrally managed and funded pilot program across ten schools with professionally qualified staff to demonstrate the value and impact a well-resourced and curated school library can have. It is recommended the sample include primary schools, secondary schools and senior secondary colleges.

Theme 1 - Defining educational success

We need to ensure that our education system has clearly agreed objectives that are transparently reported. What does success look like after the formal years of schooling in the Tasmanian context and how do we better encourage our young people to aspire to achieve?

Educational success - Literate young adults

Our society needs literate young adults, finishing their schooling, to be ready for a wide variety of postschool contributions. As a low-population state and country, Tasmania and mainland Australia need to engage in high value industries at the global level, while supporting our own society and way of life at the local level. This means that our young people need to have the skills and opportunities to choose amongst the wide variety of opportunities available to them, from advanced research, to caring for our aging population (Hunter, Stobart, Haywood, 2004). Literacy and empathy are key skills which well-resourced, and curated school libraries assist in developing.

Evidence (Merga 2020) shows that well-resourced libraries lift literacy levels in schools by sourcing, curating, and identifying texts for each individual student, providing a responsive and customised solution to their literacy needs. Responsive school libraries support and encourage student agency and a thirst for knowledge, by engaging in student-led collection development practices, where students suggest books or topics of interest for the library to supply. School libraries provide a wider range of reading material than available at home or in a small class collection. School libraries should also reflect, highlight, and encourage the diversity of their community and the school's special interests. Well-resourced school libraries promote wellbeing and the development of empathy, both through the content of their collections and the practice within their spaces.

Professionally qualified school library staff are experts in literacy development of all kinds; from basic, through to information, media, and advanced research skills, enabling them to prepare young people for higher education research, providing instruction on identifying relevant research, and where to locate it. Students that have experienced a well-resourced school library are better prepared to be a lifelong learner, and wider community member, whether engaging in an apprenticeship or university education.

Theme 2 - Strengthening supports and engagement for all learners at all stages of their education

How can we collectively support Tasmanian learners to get the most out of their entire education experience and ensure all students reach their potential?

Libraries – Supporting engagement for all learners at all stages

Engagement in the school setting is primarily founded on modelling, success, and agency. We know that positive attitudes to school from home have the greatest impact on school success. Following this, success and agency are essential components for students to reach their full potential. It is well recognised that literacy is one of the foundational skills enabling educational success, and that it has an outsized effect. We know that students with lower literacy skills fall further and further behind as they move through the education system. Our strong contention is that the Tasmanian education system is missing a key component of supporting our students and our teachers to better develop student literacy.

Well-resourced school libraries can empower students, their teachers and by extension, support their families on their literacy journeys. Reading fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension are three of the five pillars of Reading Instruction in the Science of Reading approach to literacy that must be supported by long-term self-directed practice. Student self-directed reading is an essential part of getting the large amount of practice that students need to gain excellent literacy skills. School libraries fundamentally support this equitably by providing a far greater range and volume of reading resources than even the most well-resourced home library or class library can hope to achieve. A school library does not resource just four or five members of a family, or twenty-five students in a class, but hundreds of students in a school, across many years of their school attendance. This scale enables efficiencies across the board, from wide variety and broad diversity of subject matter, skill level, social and religious interest, and volume. This starts from kindergarten, where students can take books home that they choose that their parents can read to them. It continues right through primary school, and beyond, where students are known to sneak books into bed and read by torchlight. Which other school subjects do students sneak into their beds to practice? Dedicated school library staff develop longitudinal relationships with their school students, they do not see those students for just one year, but every year that

each student attends that school, enabling those staff to support each individual student's interests and growth with an individual personalised solution.

The school library's contribution does not just finish with providing personal reading interest for students, but also becomes a wellbeing heart for the school. A well-staffed library provides a safe, more closely supervised space at recess and lunchtime, where students can come to shelter from the sometimes hectic, or rough external spaces to a more comfortable place. School libraries are less dominated by physicality and can be a place for conversation, comfortable furniture, card, and board games. School libraries can provide less formal performance spaces for students to perform music, drama, etc. for their peers. School libraries can also be a comfortable place for homework, especially for those whose home environment is not supportive.

School libraries in Tasmania aim to network with the State Library of Tasmania's public libraries' network, Libraries Tasmania as part of our commitment to preparing Tasmanian students for life-long learning.

Theme 3 - Outcomes at the conclusion of the formal years of schooling

Noting the specific challenges that emerge as young people progress through schooling; how can we improve attendance, retention, attainment, and student outcomes to better support choice of learning and career pathways?

Meeting Needs, engaging students, helping them succeed in literacy

The most important priority for Tasmanian young people to complete year 12 is high literacy skills. Students that develop literacy at the expected rate are successful at school, whereas students that fall behind, fall behind further every year. Success at school is predicated on the ability to learn through reading. Students need to move beyond de-coding so they can focus on gleaning meaning. Students develop functional reading from kindergarten, moving to instructional reading to reading for pleasure (RfP) through the rest of their school life. International studies show the value of RfP for young people by improving well-being, school performance, empathy, and social inclusion (Auckland University of Technology School of Education, 2021, section 4.1). Students are motivated when their needs are met with texts that engage their interest, and when they see themselves (reflected practice), that is when they will happily read and develop literacy skills. Student engagement can be tracked through reports created in the library management system, such as borrowing patterns and related statistics showing the volume of reading as well as the level of a text. This data is important in supporting interventions (Merga, 2022, p. 150).

Students learn more effectively when they feel safe. School libraries are acknowledged as wellbeing safe spaces. The school library can also provide a welcoming study space for students who for whatever reason are unable to study at home. Students now exist in an information economy, and professional library staff can instruct students to create, navigate, and interrogate information. High literacy skills include research skills, understanding academic integrity, the ability to identify reliable sources, media literacy, information literacy, and copyright, these skills are the core practice of teacher librarians, and professional library staff.

The need in senior secondary classes in particular for students to achieve a sound foundation in the basics of academic integrity including verification of sources being quoted in assignments, correct referencing of cited sources to

TASC standards, and appropriate handling of generative artificial intelligence writing tools, and the whole field of writing using sources are all areas where post-graduate qualified teacher librarians come into their own in helping senior secondary students. These are areas where subject teachers teaching an already crowded syllabus rely on the expertise and support of senior secondary teacher librarians, where teachers work in a school or college that employs them, and not all senior secondary education providers in Tasmania do. These are skill sets that are used later in tertiary study and report writing in industry. The increasingly uneven distribution of a diminishing pool of teacher librarians particularly at senior secondary level has accordingly created an increasingly uneven playing field for students across the Tasmanian Education System.

Theme 4 - Support for our teaching workforce

How do we attract, support, and develop teachers and school leaders to be effective and successful practitioners who can confidently deliver high quality, evidence-based teaching that meets the needs of students at all levels?

Attracting teachers through a dynamic and well-resourced school library.

School libraries can be an amazingly efficient resource to support classroom teachers and leaders. Teachers and school leaders know the importance of literacy for their students, they want to provide the resources to support their students' literacy journeys. Having access to a central school resource whose ideology is pedagogical in outlook and centred around sharing and custom solutions would be a dream come true.

A well-resourced school library is flexible and responsive to its users' needs. A teacher that needs to teach a unit on Australian Federation can go straight to the library and find existing resources to support both their teaching, and their students' learning, they do not have to research or spend their class budget on these resources, the school library staff know the curriculum and what teachers will need to teach. A teacher that wants to teach a new unit on First Nations People and their Fire practices that has never been taught at their school before can go to their school library staff a little bit ahead of time and discuss their needs, and the library staff can research and source materials, and have them ready, and those resources will be available and accessible to the entire school community for years to come, rather tucked into a cupboard never to be seen again.

Professional school library staff should already be experts in researching, resourcing, referencing, copyright, and other information management skills, able to assist in managing and teaching these skills. School library staff should also be experts in engaging and supporting struggling readers and will have developed invaluable longitudinal relationships with students that both teachers and leaders can take advantage of. School library staff maintain student-staff relationships not limited to an annual class, but throughout a student's total long-term attendance at the school. As mentioned above, supporting a student's literacy journey is an essential component of student

success, and enabling success buttressed through the school library is of great support to teachers.

School libraries are also able to support teachers and leaders through professional development resources, encouraging teachers and leaders to request those resources be purchased by the school library, teachers can spend less of their own resources, and the school library is then able to support other teachers with those same resources. School libraries also can provide a suitable place where teachers can come to work, on their own or in small groups, in a larger and more pleasantly appointed location than staff offices.

Theme 5 - Accountability for improved outcomes

How do we ensure that policy initiatives are implemented, and resources are used to improve learning outcomes?

Accountable School Libraries

School libraries, like many other school endeavors, require adequate expenditure, and their facilitating contribution to student outcomes can be somewhat challenging to measure at the school level. Further, very few schools in Tasmania have had a high quality, well-resourced school library in the recent past for staff and principals to have experienced the value of their contribution. In Tasmania, unlike some other states, school libraries live or die at the whim of local management, in ways that other programs like PE or Science do not. There are, however, several metrics that libraries can use to measure their effect. Libraries can use ASLA/ALIA guidelines, standards and statistics such as the average number of books borrowed overall, and the interplay of these statistics between similar libraries, or within schools, to measure overall effectiveness, and between classes to measure the impact of individual teachers. School libraries reporting annually to principals and business managers and/or even a central school library management, on their expenditure, borrowing statistics, and participation within the school community is important. And of course, comparing NAPLAN results between those schools with school libraries and those schools without school library is revealing.

Currently school libraries are accountable only to school leadership, who have no experience or expertise when it comes to school libraries, their educational value and the importance of professional staffing levels in school libraries, and are therefore themselves unable to make informed decisions about a school library's effectiveness, and yet are being asked to fund them. Tasmanian school leaders may never have experienced the value that a well-resourced school library can bring. If school libraries were funded centrally, they could also be centrally managed by experienced school library professionals, able to provide professional development, performance reviews, and informed oversight. Thus such central support will also support principals in their decision-making in this area.

Professional school library staff will have an in-depth knowledge of their library collections and will bring a consistent school-wide approach to the school's pedagogical approach to developing their students as readers. This practical,

on-the-ground support for leaders and teachers can relieve teacher overload and provide additional release time during library-based sessions for classes.

References

- ACT Government. (2019). *School Libraries: the Heart of 21st Century Learning*.
https://www.education.act.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0007/1435435/School-Libraries-The-Heart-of-21st-Century-Learning.pdf
- Auckland University of Technology School of Education for the Pūtoi Rito Communities of Readers initiative. (2021). *Reading for Pleasure for the Collective Good of Aotearoa New Zealand*. [Literature review]. [Reading for pleasure for the collective good of Aotearoa New Zealand | National Library of New Zealand \(natlib.govt.nz\)](https://www.natlib.govt.nz/reading-for-pleasure-for-the-collective-good-of-aotearoa-new-zealand)
- Dix, K., Felgate, R., Ahmed, S., Carlsake, T., & Sniedze-Gregory, S. (2020). *School Libraries in South Australia 2019 Census*. Australian Council for Educational Research. <https://doi.org/10.37517/978-1-74286-583-6>
- Garrison, K., & FitzGerald, L. (2019). "It Trains Your Brain: Student Reflections on Using the Guided Inquiry Design Process." *Synergy*, 15(2). <https://slav.vic.edu.au/index.php/Synergy/article/view/v15220179>
- Hay, Lyn. (2022). *ALIA Professional Pathways: School Libraries Research Project Report*. <https://read.alia.org.au/alia-professional-pathways-school-libraries-research-project-report>
- Hughes, H. (2013). *School Libraries and Teacher-Librarians: Evidence of Their Contribution to Student Literacy and Learning*. <https://eprints.qut.edu.au/219959/>
- Hunter, J. Stobart, A. Haywood, A. (2024). *The Reading Guarantee: How to Give Every Child the Best Chance of Success*. <https://grattan.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/The-Reading-Guarantee-Grattan-Institute-Report.pdf>
- Lance, K. C. & Kachel, D. E. (2018). *Why School Librarians Matter: What Years of Research Tell Us*. <https://kappanonline.org/lance-kachel-school-librarians-matter-years-research/>
- Lonsdale, M. (2003). *Impact of School Libraries on Student Achievement: A review of the Research (Report for the Australian School Library*

Association). Melbourne, Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER). https://research.acer.edu.au/tll_misc/23

Merga, M. (2020). *How Can School Libraries Support Student Wellbeing? Evidence and Implications for Further Research*.
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01930826.2020.1773718>

Merga, M. K. (2020). School Librarians as Literacy Educators Within a Complex Role. *Journal of Library Administration*, 60(8), 889–908.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/01930826.2020.1820278>

Merga, M. K. (2022). *School Libraries Supporting Literacy and Wellbeing*. London, Facet Publishing.

Raffaele, D. (2021). “Cultivating the ‘Third Place’ in School Libraries to Support Student Wellbeing.” *Synergy*, 19(1).
<https://slav.vic.edu.au/index.php/Synergy/article/view/489>

Scholastic Library Publishing. (2016). *School Libraries Work! A Compendium of Research Supporting the Effectiveness of School Libraries*.
https://www.scholastic.com/SLW2016/resources/documents/SLW_Booklet_Final_Lo.pdf

Softlink Education. (2024). *2023 School Library Survey Report*.
<https://www.softlinkint.com/blog/2023-school-library-survey-report-australia/>