



*Library and Information Association
of New Zealand Aotearoa
Te Rau Herenga O Aotearoa*

Education Portfolio

BRIEFING FOR THE INCOMING MINISTER

The important role of the School Librarian

October 2017

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1. Executive Summary

Research shows that a professional school librarian partnering in curriculum design increases test results, literacy levels, and educational achievements of students, contributing significantly to the lifelong learning outcomes of citizens. Currently in New Zealand we are not consistently realising these benefits – with Aotearoa’s school librarians under-valued, under-paid and under-resourced. We recommend the following:

- School Librarians be treated as professional and valued members of the school’s teaching and learning community with a clear career framework which supports and demonstrates their vital role in support and delivery of The National Curriculum (both the New Zealand Curriculum and Te Marautanga o Aotearoa).
- The Ministry of Education partners with the National Library, in conjunction with sector expertise and experience to provide School Librarian support to all schools and Kura within Aotearoa New Zealand.

2. About us

The New Zealand Library Association Inc, (LIANZA) is the national organisation supporting organisations and professionals working in library and information services throughout Aotearoa New Zealand. LIANZA represents 379 institutions and 1418 individuals.

Founded in 1910 the Association serves and promotes the interests of the Aotearoa New Zealand library and information industry. It advises and advocates on developments in libraries; promotes excellence and quality in librarianship with a range of awards and recognition; supports reading, authors and publishers through its long standing book awards, including the oldest award in Aotearoa New Zealand, the Esther Glen medal; and encourages lifelong learning for those working libraries through its professional registration scheme and professional development opportunities.

LIANZA maintains links with national and international bodies with similar values and objectives. It has a partnership with Te Rōpu Whakahau, and is a member of the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA).

3. The current situation

The situation for school librarians in New Zealand is alarmingly inequitable failing many young New Zealanders. As a country we cannot currently state the number of school librarians working in schools, nor the number of school libraries, as this data is no longer captured by the Ministry of Education. This lack of measurement and the current school library decline reflects the current state of inequity many of Aotearoa New Zealand’s most in need children and young people are experiencing.

The school library has become an optional “nice-to-have” funded from the operational budget and are frequently victim to budget cuts due to wider school budget issues. School librarians are poorly paid, and often without effective professional development. Their hours are also not sufficiently budgeted for meaning school librarians are unable to consistently provide services responsive to the needs of their school communities.

This means that many students are unable to benefit from the positive impact that a school librarian on their educational outcome, and it is those in lower socio-economic areas who are most affected.

4. Reading for Pleasure

Reading for Pleasure is defined by the National Library as “Reading we do of our own free will, anticipating the satisfaction we will get from the act of reading”.

Longitudinal studies show that children who read for pleasure are the most likely to show both strong educational outcomes, and social mobility. Reading for pleasure is a stronger indicator than socio-economic status as to educational and vocational achievement in life.

The OECD have demonstrated that reading for pleasure is critical to a child’s life long educational outcomes, increased empathy, and also supports positive mental health outcomes including increased feelings of well-being. This is supported by other international research.

5. Reading Loss

Reading loss occurs when those who have worked to gain reading skills in an education setting fail to build reading into their leisure or other activities and are unable to maintain their literacy level.

In children it has been demonstrated that significant reading loss occurs over the holidays for those children who do not have access to regular reading material. This loss is cumulative and by the time a child graduates from high school they can be up to two to three years behind their counterparts who read for pleasure over the summer.

In adults a “use it or lose it” factor is noted by the OECD in relation to proficiency in information processing skills. Education levels are less relevant than whether adults are given the opportunity to develop and maintain proficiency.

Reading loss is more likely to impact those in low socio-economic environments who are unable to access regular reading material, and makes the role of school and public libraries incredibly important.

Reading loss can be mitigated through the encouragement of reading for pleasure, and through the provision of holiday reading material, via either a public or school library.

6. The Impact of the School Librarian

The Labour Manifesto on Education talks about Barrier Free Access – “breaking down the barriers to participation at all levels”. A professional School Librarian plays a significant role in demolishing barriers to educational achievement. Research has conclusively shown that a school librarian increases test scores, literacy levels (including digital literacy), improves overall educational outcomes for students supporting lifelong learning. They do this through supporting curriculum development, literacy training, tertiary preparation, effective collection management, and reader’s advisory to encourage reading for pleasure. The school’s library is a neutral, safe, equitable service and space where student’s educational and recreational needs and curiosities are encouraged, supported and fostered.

7. Remuneration and Professional Development of Librarians

The Labour Manifesto on Education states the need for “ongoing opportunities for professional working with the system to engage in professional development”. It also recognises the poor pay rates of support staff, and rightly so - which is where school librarians are currently.

Pay rates for many school library staff are appalling, especially those considered part time who are not paid for school holidays. Pro rata'd to include school holidays school librarian salaries are often below minimum wage.

In order to truly reap the benefits that a school librarian can provide they must be put on a professional footing, with clear career frameworks and remuneration at a level that recognises their value and contribution to student learning outcomes.

8. The Opportunity for Partnership

While it may not be possible to provide a full-time school librarian to every school, it is critical that each school has a library collection and support from a professional librarian to support literacy and digital literacy training and student engagement with reading material. Communities of Learning offer opportunities to think creatively and equitably and provide solutions that meet the needs of learners in schools and Kura.

National Library currently provides Services to Schools, supporting School Librarians in their role, and also providing access to fiction and non-fiction reading material.

We suggest that the Ministry of Education partner with the National Library in conjunction with sector expertise to design and implement a model where all schools have the support of a School Librarian.

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