

Softlink International



Library budgets, staffing and literacy in Australian schools

Findings from *Softlink's 2011 Australian School Library Survey*

Executive Summary

In March 2011, Softlink conducted an *Australian School Library Survey* into school library budgets, staffing, and literacy levels in Australian schools. This was the second year the survey has been conducted, to allow Softlink to compare and report on significant findings for the education sector, and any changes which may have occurred over the last 12 months. This paper summarises the information derived from the survey and explores the relationships between budgets, staffing and student literacy levels in school libraries.

Softlink's position in conducting this work is that Australian school libraries should be more adequately and consistently funded and students are given greater access to resources and appropriately trained professionals within the library.

Principle findings from *Softlink's 2011 Australian School Library Survey* include:

- Where student numbers are the same, it is shown that primary school libraries receive significantly less funding and staff allocated to the library than secondary schools.
- Four out of five school libraries which responded have experienced a budget decrease, in real terms, compared to the previous year.
- One in six respondent schools have decreased their school library budget by more than 10% in the last 12 months.
- Larger Government schools have significantly less staff allocated to the school library, compared to the larger Catholic and Independent schools.
- There is a significant positive relationship between a school's NAPLAN reading literacy score, the school library's budget and staff allocated to the library.
- The difference in funding and literacy outcomes can be quantified. In general, low performing schools allocate 30% less to the school library budget than average schools. Higher performing schools allocate twice as much to the school library budget as average schools.

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1.0 Introduction

Softlink is a global supplier of leading-edge Library Management Systems to schools, academic, public, and special libraries. Established in 1983, Softlink is an Australian company with global influence, encompassing 108 countries, and more than 10,000 clients. Currently more than 40% of Australian school libraries use Softlink's Library Management Solutions. The head office is in Brisbane, Queensland, with international offices in Oxford (UK), Seattle (USA), and Auckland (NZ).

Softlink's systems are powerful tools for students, librarians and teachers, allowing key interaction between students, the library and parents. This is accomplished through core web based applications, as well as, full library management and administrative functions. Softlink systems provide support for learning and education to students around the world.

In order to accurately represent and support Australian school libraries and the people who manage them, Softlink has chosen to continue their survey work in 2011 into school library budgets, school library staffing and literacy levels.

1.1 Survey Purpose

In 2010, there was the opportunity to submit a response to the Australian Federal Government's *'Inquiry into school libraries and teacher librarians in Australian Schools'*. In order to accurately represent Australian school libraries and their staff, Softlink conducted a survey into school library budgets and staffing levels. Responses from the survey were then compared with NAPLAN literacy results, obtained from the Australian Federal Government's *My School* website. Softlink wished to expand on this research and conducted a follow-up survey in March, 2011.

Softlink has supported schools libraries and school library professionals for over 27 years. School libraries play a pivotal role in education, particularly in literacy. It has long been discussed that a school library with adequate resources and trained professionals leads to a positive effect on literacy levels. For example, the Management Committee reporting on the 1996 National School English Literacy Survey concluded:

*"Schools differ markedly in average levels of literacy achievement. There appear to be a number of factors associated with higher levels of literacy achievement in schools. Students in schools where teachers make greater use of the school library with their classes tend to have higher levels of literacy achievement."*¹

The evidence in the 1996 study clearly linked a well-utilised library with improved literacy outcomes. This study found library use was more likely to predict literacy outcomes, than the gender of the student, the frequency of homework, or the experience of the teacher. These correlations proved to be even stronger in the early years of education. It is worthy to note, that on the same scale, the level of library usage was on par with socio-economic factors in predicting literacy outcomes.

¹ Management Committee for the National School English Literacy Survey 1997, *Mapping Literacy Achievement: Results of the 1996 National School English Literacy Survey*, (G Harrington, Chair), Dept. Of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs, Camberwell, Victoria, Australia.

1.2 Respondents to survey

Softlink invited responses from 9,786 schools across Australia. Responses were received from approximately 13% of these schools across Australia. Data has been compiled from these responses to illustrate key points in this report. The trends and results of the survey provide indicative data relationships, which are referred throughout this paper.

The table below shows the breakdown of school respondents by education provider.

Table 1.1: Survey Respondents

School Type	Government	Independent	Anglican	Catholic	Total
Primary	550	28	7	114	699
Primary & Secondary	67	111	50	25	253
Secondary	244	14	2	73	333
Total	861	153	59	212	1285

2.0 Survey Results

The Survey consisted of 21 questions, covering:

1. Library budgets
2. Library staffing & professional development
3. The combined impact of library budgets & staffing level
4. Other survey topics including E-books and Federal Government budget funding.

Both the 2010 and 2011 *Softlink Australian School Survey* revealed a positive correlation between higher NAPLAN literacy scores and two key library resourcing indicators. It was found:

- There was a significant positive correlation between the annual school library budget and NAPLAN Reading Literacy results for the school;
- There was a significant positive correlation between the number of school librarians employed in the school library and NAPLAN Reading Literacy results for the school;
- Both the budget and librarian correlations strengthen as students progressed from Grade 3 through to Grade 9.

2.1 School Library Budgets

2.1.1 Allocation of school budgets in Australia

Based on the sample data received, all budget analysis was conducted on median results. This was due to the skewing of average results by higher funded school libraries. That is, some schools have budgets which are much larger than other schools, which result in a much higher mean average.

In the 2010 survey, responses for the budget question were made in multiple choice. Respondents were asked to select one of four budget ranges, and the top range was ‘budgets greater than \$20,000.’ Answers in the 2011 survey were given in a free text response, which accurately captured larger school budgets.

The following graphs illustrate the allocated school library budgets for the year including 31 January, 2011:

- School Types - Primary, Secondary, and Combined (K-12) (Figure 1.1)
- Education Providers – Government, Catholic, Independent (Figure 1.2)

Figure 1.1: Comparison of School Library Budgets for School Types in Australia, 2011

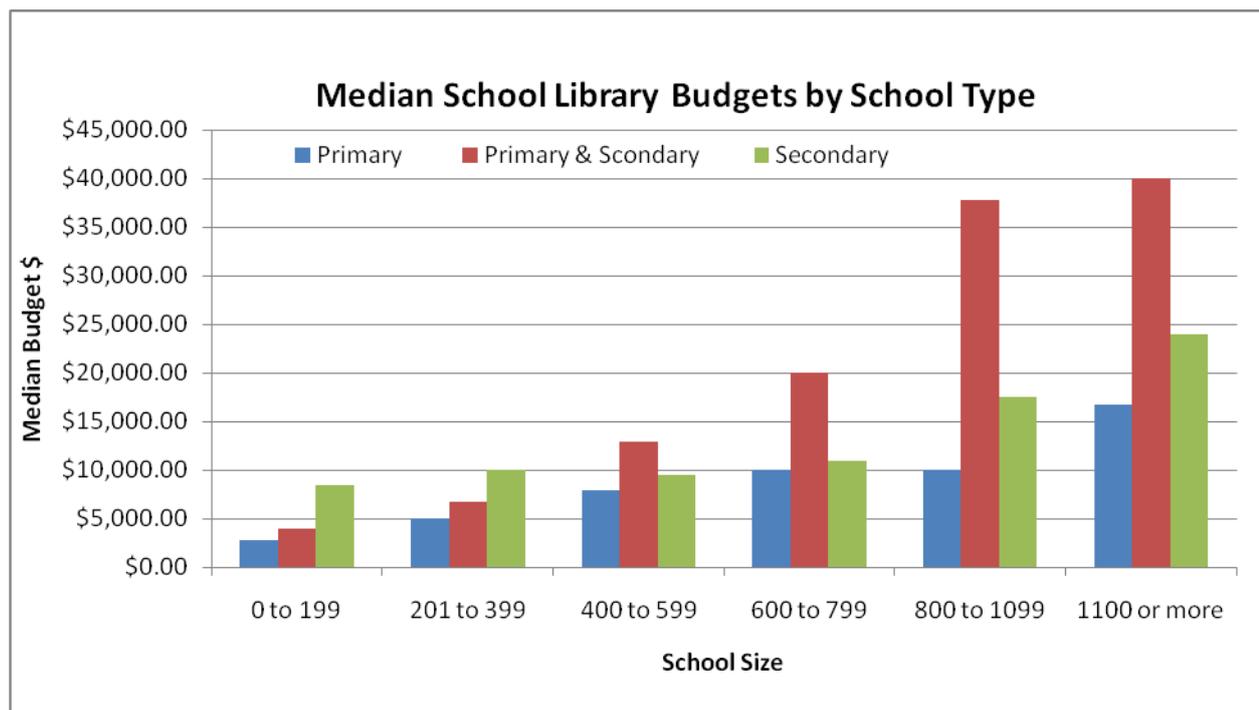


Figure 1.1 reveals primary school libraries continue to receive significantly less funding than secondary schools. Based on analysis of data, this is consistent even where student numbers are the same.

Figure 1.2: Comparison of School Library Budgets by Education Providers in Australia, 2011

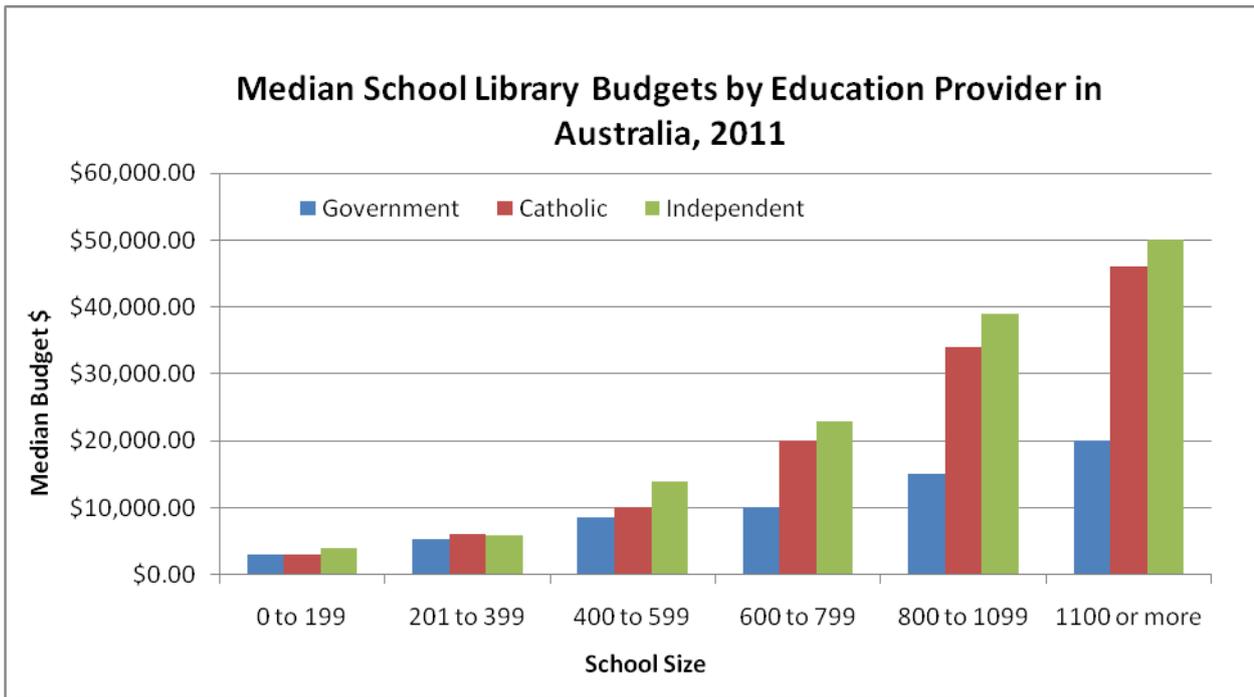


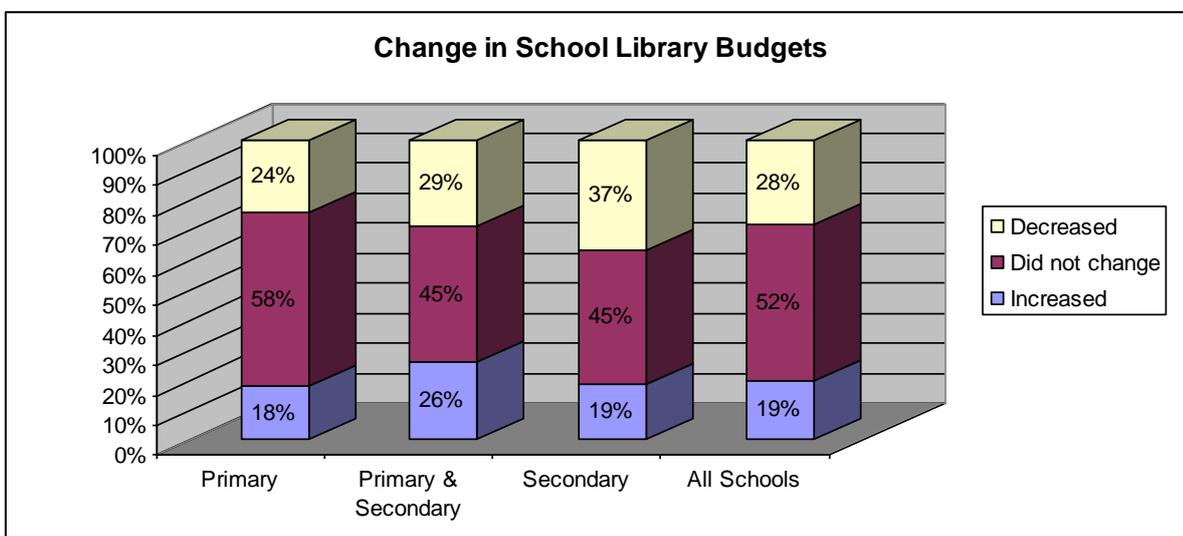
Figure 1.2 shows that Government schools have lower school library budgets, compared to Catholic and Independent schools. The gap increases markedly as the school size increases.

It was again evident in the 2011 data that school library budgets differed greatly between schools. This reflects the results of decentralised decision making and different priorities being applied to the school library. This appears consistent across education providers, States, and student populations.

2.1.3 Change in Library Budgets

Respondents were asked to identify how their current budget differed from that of the previous 12 months. The figure below summarises these changes in school library budgets over the last 12 months:

Figure 1.3: Change in School Library Budgets across Different School Levels in Australia, 2011.



It is important to note that Australian CPI ran at 2.7% for the year in question. For the purposes of this study, library budgets which remained the same were determined to experience a decrease in real terms.

The points drawn from this analysis when compared to the prior year budget are:

- Across all respondents 28% of school library budgets decreased
- Across all respondents 80% of school library budgets decreased or remained the same
- Total library budgets across all respondents decreased by 0.66% in total
- Primary school budgets largely remained the same from the previous year
- 37% of secondary schools reported a decrease in their school library budget. 21% of secondary schools reported a decrease of more than 10%
- 41% of Victorian schools reported a decrease from the prior year and 86% reported either no change or a decrease
- 84% of Australian government schools reported either a decrease or no change from the prior year budget
- 33% of Independent schools experienced an increase from the prior year budget
- 1 in 6 schools has decreased their school library budget by more than 10%.

The overall results indicated 28% of school libraries received budget cuts, with 16% of school library budgets experiencing an over 10% decrease. Over half of the school library budgets remained the same as the previous year, despite increasing demands to update their resources in accordance with technology trends.

2.1.2 Australian School Library Budgets and Literacy levels

Survey results appear to demonstrate many Australian school libraries are allocated low, and decreasing annual budgets, and run the risk of being under-funded.

The school library budget was compared with the school's NAPLAN reading literacy levels, as was analysed in 2010. The results again supported the number of years of research showing a well funded library had significant educational benefits for students.

Figure 2.5: Comparison of Reading Literacy Results with Average School Library Budget for year including 31 January 2011, Australia

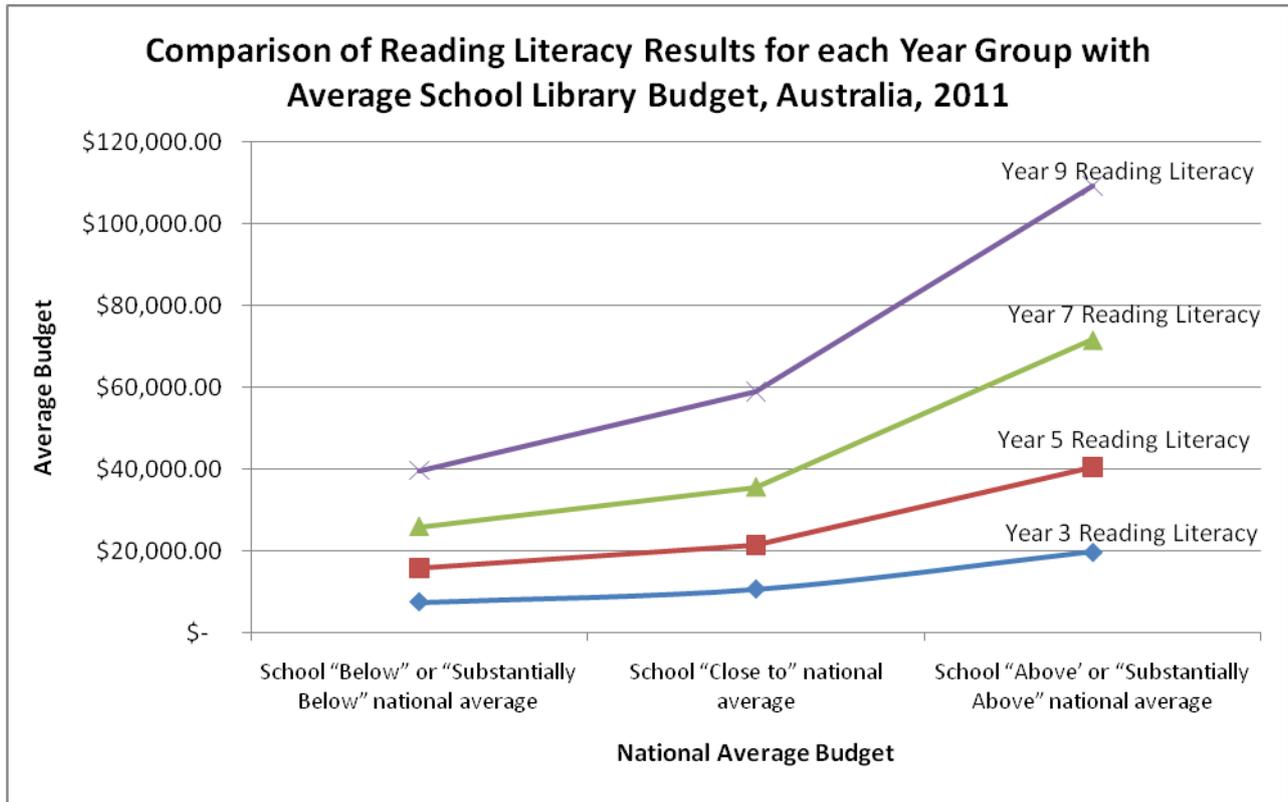


Figure 2.5 illustrates the relationship between the school library budget and NAPLAN results. The NAPLAN results split schools into 5 categories: “Substantially Below”, “Below”, “Close to”, “Above” and “Substantially Above” the national average. If schools are grouped on this basis, then the average school library budget increases in line with reading literacy results.

Generally, schools that achieve reading literacy results “Below” or “Substantially Below” the national average, has a school library budget between one quarter and one third less, than those that achieve reading literacy results close to the national average. Across all schools, this amounts to the average dollar difference of \$4,809.

Furthermore, schools that achieve reading literacy results that are “Above” or “Substantially Above” the national average, allocate a budget that is twice as much to the school library than those that achieve reading literacy results close to the national average. Across all schools this amounts to an average dollar difference of \$12,584.

2.1.3 Correlations between Library Budgets and NAPLAN results for 2010 and 2011

Using the Reading Literacy results above, a correlation was calculated between the school's library budget and reading literacy results. The results were remarkably consistent with those calculated in 2010, but with an increased sample size.

The table below lists the correlation between Australian school Library budgets according to survey respondents, and NAPLAN Literacy results obtained from the *My School* Website for 2010 and 2011.

Table 2.1: Correlation of Literacy results with Australian School Library Budgets

Calculated Correlation	Sample size		Library Budget	
	2010	2011	2010	2011
Yr 3 Reading	293	522	.26	.27
Yr 5 Reading	298	520	.30	.26
Yr 7 Reading	274	425	.30	.36
Yr 9 Reading	209	306	.34	.37

2.2 School Library Staffing Levels

Respondents were asked to allocate the school library’s staffing into four categories of employed staff:

- Qualified teacher librarians
- Qualified librarians
- Teachers
- Other paid library staff

The figures below shows the average Full Time Equivalents (FTEs) for library staff employed in Australian Schools, based on education providers (Figure 2.6) and school types (Figure 2.7).

Figure 2.6: Comparison of Library Staff FTEs by Education Providers and School Size, Australia, 2011

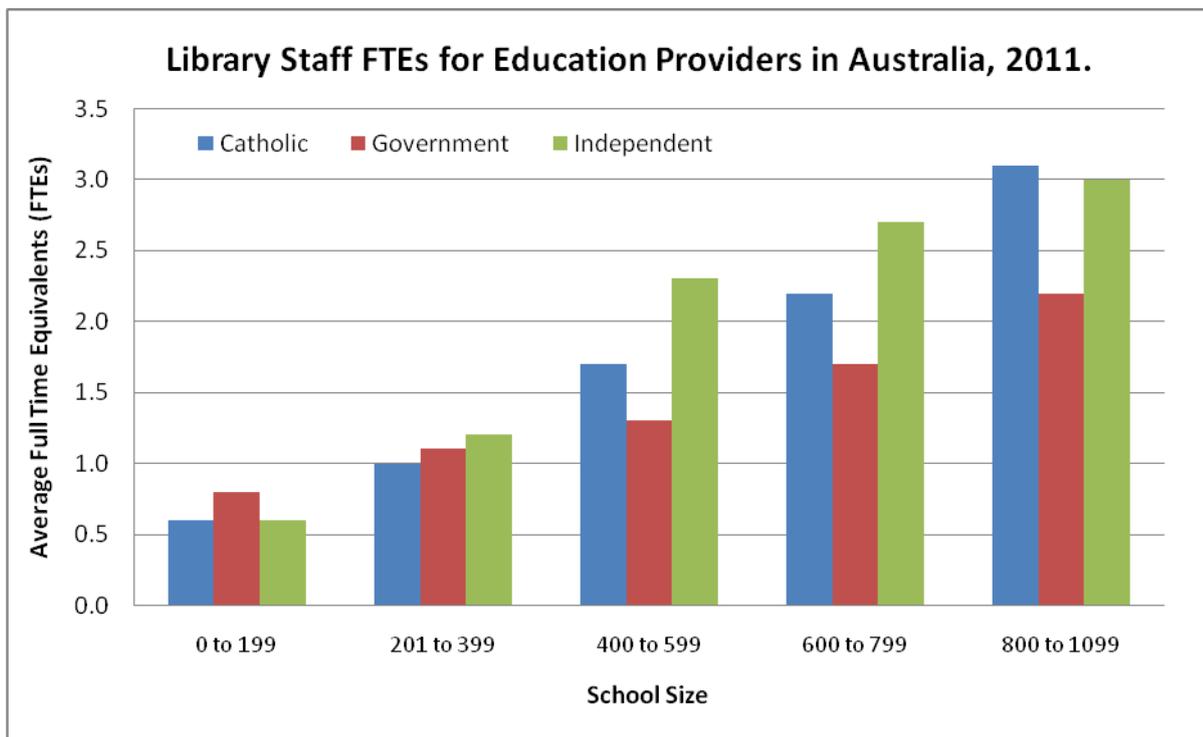


Figure 2.6 shows that larger Government schools have less library staff compared to Catholic and Independent schools of the same size. However, in smaller schools it appears that Government schools are relatively well staffed.

Figure 2.7: Comparison of Library Staff FTEs by School Types, Australia, 2011

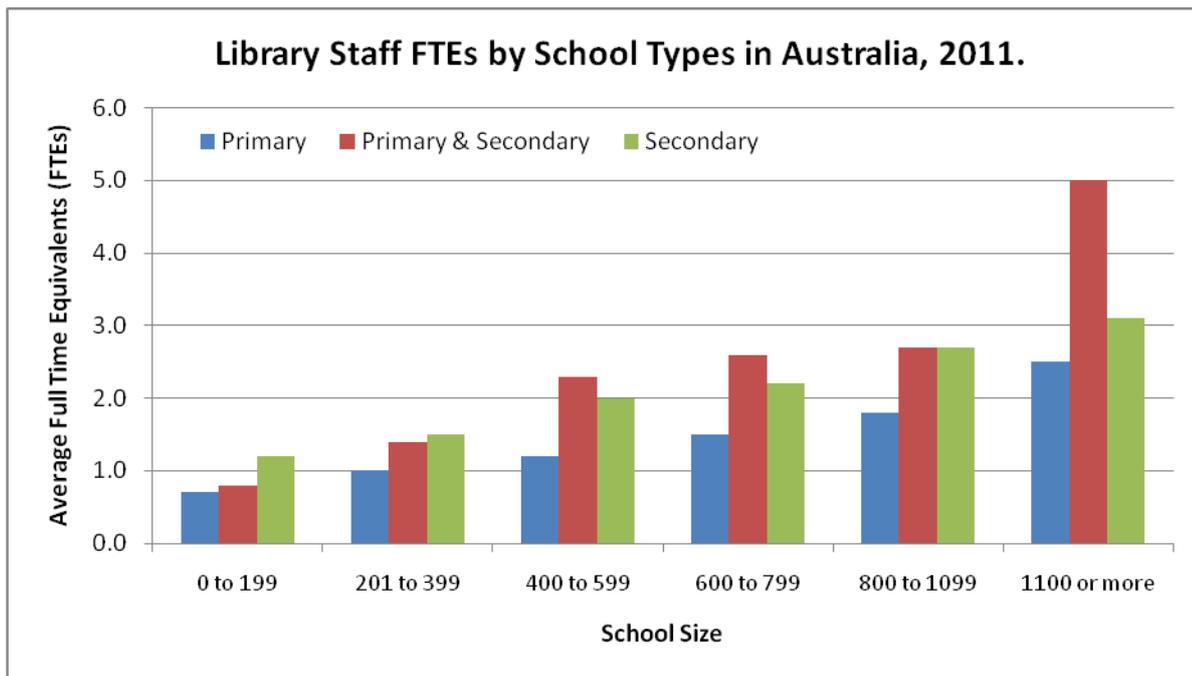


Figure 2.7 shows Primary schools have much fewer staff allocated to the school library, compared to secondary and combined schools, despite student numbers being the same. In addition, combined Primary and Secondary schools (K-12) receive significantly higher teacher librarian support when compared to only Primary or Secondary schools of over 1100 students or more.

These results again highlight the inconsistencies between school libraries within different States, education providers, and school types, when it comes to Library Staff Full Time Equivalents (FTEs).

2.2.1 Correlations between qualified school library staff and NAPLAN results for 2010 and 2011

The table below illustrates the correlations between Australian school library staff according to survey respondents, and NAPLAN Literacy results obtained from the *My School* Website for 2010 and 2011. As with the school library budgets the results for the 2010 and 2011 surveys were remarkably similar and indicate a strengthening relationship as students progress through their schooling.

Table 2.2: Correlation of Literacy results with Number of School Librarians in Australian School Libraries

Calculated Correlation	Sample size		Number of School Librarians Employed	
	2010	2011	2010	2011
Yr 3 Reading	293	522	.22	.21
Yr 5 Reading	298	520	.24	.23
Yr 7 Reading	274	425	.31	.28
Yr 9 Reading	209	306	.34	.38

2.2.2 Professional Development for Library Staff

Respondents were asked to estimate the total number of professional development hours undertaken by staff type in the last 12 months.

The Full Time Equivalents (FTE) were rounded up to the nearest FTE. Below are the averaged totals of total hours carried out by each type of employee. This is the average undertaken, regardless of the hours that they work within the school library.

Table 2.3: Professional Development hours of School Library Staff in Australia, 2011

	Averaged Total hours
Teacher Librarian	27
Qualified Librarian	15
Teacher	13
Other Library Staff	6

The average totals for each type of library employee table 2.3.

3.0 Conclusion

The conclusions that can be drawn from the survey results are that schools who invest in their libraries by allocating larger budgets and more school librarian resources achieve higher literacy results.

It is also evident that school libraries across all States, levels, and sectors, receive different levels of support from their Principals and local policy makers, despite the finding that the role of the school library is central to the school library and literacy.

With the positive correlations made in relation to school staffing levels, library resources and NAPLAN results, it is evident there should be more appreciation for the school library's role in creating positive literacy results for students. There needs to be in place consistent policy and decision making across the board.

The issues surrounding budgets for the library is one of major concern. There is currently a great emphasis for libraries to update their technology and to migrate to digital resources. The need for the library to stay abreast of these trends while maintaining existing items seems to be a constant strain on the library budget. With 80% of Australia's secondary schools looking to purchase eBooks in the following year, and the technology required to utilise this new resources, this task seems to be extremely difficult due to the evidence of decreasing budgets.