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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Main Committee

COMMITTEES

Education and Employment Committee

Report

SPEECH

Tuesday, 24 May 2011

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

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Speaker	Andrews, Karen, MP	Question No.	

Mrs ANDREWS (McPherson) (20:00): I rise to speak on the report *School libraries and teacher librarians in 21st century Australia*. By way of background to the report, notifications announcing the establishment of the inquiry were made on 18 March 2010 for the 42nd parliament and on 25 November 2010 for the 43rd parliament. Through the committee's website and the *Australian*, the inquiry was advertised to the public. As a consequence, a total of 386 submissions and nine supplementary submissions were received from a variety of sources, including individuals, education departments, schools, teachers and community groups.

The inquiry offered relevant stakeholders the opportunity to comment on the contribution made by school libraries and teacher librarians to education in Australia as well as to examine what else might be done to increase their value. This report is the result of both the submissions and the evidence gathered for the inquiry into school libraries and teacher librarians in the last parliament.

On 23 May 2011 the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Employment, of which I am a member, tabled its report. The library and information management sector has for some time now called for an inquiry such as this so that the work of school libraries and teacher librarians could be reviewed. I note particularly the positive role the inquiry and report have made in raising the often unassuming and understated role of teacher librarians and the constructive contributions they make to our education system. Having said that, I share the concern of my colleague and deputy chair of the committee, the member for Grey, Rowan Ramsey, that teacher librarians are probably not as valued by schools as an educational source as much as they should be—although I do note that, anecdotally, teacher librarians are more likely to be given higher seniority when the schools are more engaged with their librarians.

There is a widespread lack of understanding about the role of a teacher librarian, not only within schools but also in the broader community. A New South Wales teacher librarian stated to the inquiry:

Students and teachers expect to be able to select and use resources in a library but have no idea of the time and effort it takes to develop and maintain a library collection. Many primary school parents are surprised to learn that the teacher librarian actually teaches their children.

I will now briefly discuss some of the recommendations set out in the report. Eleven recommendations were made, revolving around four central areas: the impact of recent Commonwealth government policies and investments on school libraries; the potential of school libraries and librarians to contribute to improved educational and community outcomes; the recruitment and development of teacher librarians; and partnering and supporting school libraries and teacher librarians.

The important role the internet and online technology now plays in educating our children in the 21st century was recognised, and it was recommended that a discrete national policy statement be developed with cooperation from the Commonwealth government and the states and territories. This statement will define the importance of digital and information literacy for learning and will be an effective guide for our educators. It was also recommended that all Australian schools have access to online database resources through Commonwealth funded partnerships with education authorities. Emphasis was also placed on the need for the Commonwealth government to provide support for the promotion of reading as well as an assessment and study of the links between library programs and student literacy achievements. It was also recommended that a component of training for teacher librarians should be included in the rollout of the new national curriculum. Having met with nearly all of the principals, headmasters and heads of school from both independent and state schools in McPherson, I know that this would be something that they would most likely support.

A further recommendation was made that the Commonwealth government, through the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood and Youth Affairs, discuss ways to enhance partnerships with the state, territory and local levels of government to support school libraries and teacher librarians. The report demonstrates a clear

theme that centres on the promotion of improved federal, state and local government relations to support school libraries and teacher librarians. This has been a theme in discussions that I have had with educational leaders in my electorate of McPherson.

Soon after my election, I took the opportunity to convene a meeting with most of the lead educators in McPherson. The consistent issue raised by those educators was the need for increased support, certainty and uniformity from all levels of government. This view is relevant not only to teacher librarians but to a range of education issues. At a local level, I have seen the wonderful work done by teacher librarians as they work directly with students and I will continue to support the schools in McPherson and especially the teachers, principals, headmasters, heads of school, students and teacher librarians.