



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

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

Date Tuesday, 24 May 2011 Page 4473 Questioner Speaker D'Ath, Yvette, MP	Source House Proof No Responder Question No.
---	---

Mrs D'ATH (Petrie) (20:46): It is certainly my pleasure to stand and support this report of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Employment, titled *School libraries and teacher librarians in 21st century Australia*. The member for Deakin and I were both members of the committee in the previous parliament, which commenced this inquiry, and I want to acknowledge the chair of that committee in the previous parliament, the member for Cunningham, who I know has spoken on this report. I also want to acknowledge the contributions of the member for Kingston, who is now the chair of the education and employment committee, and also the member for Robertson. I know all of these people are extremely passionate about education. This was a comprehensive inquiry. It received hundreds of submissions from teacher librarians across Australia to give evidence, and teacher librarians appeared in hearings in each state and territory. It just shows the importance of this issue to education.

The federal Labor government has made a strong commitment to investing in education. We have built, and continue to build, new libraries and resource centres, and we refurbish existing libraries and resource centres in every single primary school across this country. I have seen the benefits that have flowed from those facilities across the primary schools in the electorate of Petrie. What these facilities do is provide opportunities. It is what happens inside these facilities that is so important. That is where the learning truly happens. If we are going to optimise those opportunities, get the most from them and provide the best possible education for our children, we need to make sure that we have the skilled teachers to be able to utilise those facilities and work not just with the children but with their peers and the whole school community.

That is what we heard through this inquiry. We heard examples of teacher librarians who are working so closely with their school communities and with their principals. They are not just the teacher librarian; they are the head of curriculum. They are on the key body within the school to decide how that education is rolled out across all of the various curricula. Then we heard the examples where the teacher librarian has really become a relief teacher or is now there simply to teach people how to use the computers or the Smart Boards but not how to really utilise that resource. It was interesting that, as the report notes at 3.40, in the survey that was undertaken of librarians:

It was almost unanimously agreed (99 per cent) amongst librarians surveyed that:

Investing in school libraries and school librarians will improve literacy outcomes for students; and

School libraries and school librarians contribute to improved educational and community outcomes.

And they are seeing these results in NAPLAN results. That was the evidence of the teacher librarians.

I just want to go to some of the recommendations, and I know the member for Deakin has spoken about some of these as well. On the last point that the member for Deakin raised in relation to online database resources: how can we expect that every child in every school will get the same opportunity if they are not getting access to the same resources? That is clearly the case. That is the evidence we saw across the country. There are those schools that can afford it and are able to subscribe to the broader online databases and then there are those schools who just cannot find sufficient funds in the budget to subscribe adequately to those databases. You can put in computers and you can train the teachers but, if you do not have the resource there for them to use, the children will not get the benefit and the children will not get the same opportunities, irrespective of where they go to school. The first recommendation that we make in this report is:

The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth Government partner with all education authorities to fund the provision of a core set of online database resources, which are made available to all Australian schools.

We also saw that there was an issue with the intake of students, those who are doing degrees in education who are going on and doing a masters of education in teacher librarianship, in that really this was not being promoted as a potential career path. I note the comment of the chair in the foreword of the report:

The Committee was advised that Charles Sturt University's second semester intake of students into its Master of Education (Teacher Librarianship) had doubled in 2010, and, it was suggested that the publicity surrounding this inquiry may have been a factor in the increased numbers being attracted to the teacher librarian profession.

If that is what this inquiry did, if it does nothing else, that is a fantastic result.

But there is much more to be done. We need to make sure that, in the development of the curriculum and in every aspect of government policy and work being done to ensure the best education possible for our young people, we are looking at the role of our teacher librarians and the important function that they have within our schools. Recommendation 3 is:

The Committee recommends that the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority include statistical information about the breakdown of all specialist teachers, including teacher librarians, on the My School website.

This recommendation was made because it became clear that we do not know what specialist teachers we have in our schools. We found out in Queensland that you may have done a masters in teacher librarianship, you may be a specialist in this area, but when you register in Queensland as a teacher there is not even a category to identify yourself as a specialist in this area. That needs to be rectified. It also showed once again that we do not have consistency across the states. If we want consistent outcomes then we have to have consistency across the states on the value of teacher librarians and the recognition of this as a very important specialist teacher role.

There are many other recommendations in this report. I support each and every of one of those recommendations, as does every member who has spoken on this report. I know that this report was unanimously supported by all members from both sides of this parliament, as it should be. This is an extremely important report. It is one that I know many in my electorate have been eagerly awaiting the release of. I look forward to forwarding copies of this report out to those teacher librarians in the schools so that they can see what their effort to bring information to us has resulted in with these recommendations. I commend the report to the House. It is an extremely important report and one that I hope the government follows closely.

Debate adjourned.