



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

COMMITTEES

Education and Employment Committee

Report

SPEECH

Monday, 23 May 2011

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Date Monday, 23 May 2011
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Questioner
Speaker Ramsey, Rowan, MP

Source House
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Mr RAMSEY (Grey) (10:15): As deputy chair of the Standing Committee on Education and Employment, I rise to support the chair of the committee in her tabling of the report *School libraries and teacher librarians in 21st century Australia*. The chair has adequately covered much of the information the committee received and has thanked the appropriate people. This was an inquiry from the previous committee, of which I was not a member. Indeed, only one member of the current committee was a member of the previous committee. It was very helpful to have the member for Cunningham, Sharon Bird, and the member for Tangney, Dennis Jensen, the previous chair and deputy chair of that committee, brief us on where they had got to with the inquiry, which was almost completed. Then some of the organisations came back to re-brief us as a new committee and we did some catch-up in this area. I know the chair fielded quite a number of calls from people in the profession who were very keen that this inquiry be completed, having done all the work prior to the election.

Much of the evidence concerning this inquiry focused on the changing role of teacher librarians inasmuch as, as we progress into the digital revolution and the digital economy, the way children are learning nowadays is changing quickly. With it comes a whole new range of challenges. Many schools are not particularly well prepared or have the resources to deal with many of the things which come along with the digital revolution. Most of the time we look upon this as a great opportunity. With this opportunity comes great responsibility in the things children can access, the way they use their time on computers and in the development of skills to resist cyberbullying.

As the only representative on the committee of what I call regional Australia—as often happens—I know that a lot of small schools will struggle with this level of expertise. That evidence was brought to us particularly by the people from the Northern Territory, who raised this as an issue. One of the things that occurred to me was that schools do not always value teacher librarians as highly as they might. It was seen that teacher librarians in the private sector are held in higher regard than they are in the public sector. In particular, I was taken by one quote from a principal who said to a librarian, 'I always try to put my worst teacher in the library because this is where they do the least damage.' If that is the attitude in a school, it is little

wonder that students do not have a positive experience with their teacher librarian. Where schools are well engaged with their librarians and getting the best out of them, teacher librarians are very high in the hierarchy and are valued for what they produce and their use to the school.

We made 11 recommendations. Some of them settled on the idea of trying to promote this role within schools. It is very important that principals in particular and school councils understand what teacher librarians do, what they will do in the future, how their role is changing and how they need the resources and backing to deal with these problems, many of which we do not even understand at this stage. We made recommendations surrounding the implementation of the new national curriculum, that appropriate resources should be provided to librarians so that they can play an active role in managing that curriculum and that appropriate databases be supplied to them in an electronic form so that when people need materials in schools they can go to the librarian, much as they do now, to put their finger on exactly what resource is being looked for.

Other recommendations we made—and there is quite a range—surrounded promoting better relationships between federal, state and local government to support school libraries and teacher librarians. I was given to reflect that in the part of South Australia I come from it is very common to have a library which includes the school and the community library. I thank the staff of the secretariat for their help during the inquiry and I thank the chair and the rest of the committee for their cooperation.

The SPEAKER: Order! The time allotted for statements on the report has expired. Does the member for Kingston wish to move a motion in connection with the report to enable it to be debated on a later occasion?

Ms RISHWORTH: Yes. I move:

That the House take note of the report.

The SPEAKER: In accordance with standing order 39, the debate is adjourned and the resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.