



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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Questioner
Speaker Rishworth, Amanda, MP

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Ms RISHWORTH (Kingston) (10:10): On behalf of the Standing Committee on Education and Employment, I present the committee's report entitled *School libraries and teacher librarians in 21st century Australia*, together with the minutes of proceedings and evidence received by the committee.

Ordered that the report be made a parliamentary paper.

Ms RISHWORTH: The inquiry into school libraries and teacher librarians in Australian schools was begun in the last parliament by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training. I would like to thank the members of that committee for their efforts in assembling a large body of written and oral evidence on the terms of reference. Earlier this year, the chair and deputy chair of the previous committee gave their time to meet with the current committee to relate the views and impressions they had formed during the inquiry. Our committee appreciated their time and the insight they provided to our inquiry and I would especially like to thank the members for Cunningham and Tangney for their presentation.

The inquiry received 387 submissions and took evidence from individual teacher librarians and their professional associations, unions, employer organisations, parents and friends associations, and other stakeholders, both in written submission and at hearings in each state and territory. We are especially grateful to the hundreds of people who participated in the inquiry from right across Australia. In particular, the committee was struck by the passion and enthusiasm that teacher librarians have for their profession.

There can be little doubt of the educational benefits that accompany having a properly resourced school library staffed with an appropriately qualified and dedicated teacher librarian. Teacher librarians are individuals who hold qualifications in both teaching and librarianship. The Commonwealth government has rolled out programs that have made major contributions to the capital resources available to Australian school libraries, such as the Building the Education Revolution and the Digital Education Revolution. Despite these investments and the provision of regular general purpose funding to schools, the Commonwealth has little control or

influence on staffing arrangements within schools. The Commonwealth government is not responsible for the day-to-day management of schools. In the government sector, issues of hiring, numbers, conditions and duties of staff within schools are the responsibility of state and territory education authorities, or principals within self-managing schools. In the non-government sector, these decisions tend to be very much the responsibility of the schools themselves.

The committee received many examples of situations where school libraries and teacher librarians were used effectively. However, these success stories appeared to be exceptions rather than the rule. The majority of evidence received by the committee detailed cases where qualified teacher librarians were being used for purposes other than in their area of specialist qualification, such as relief from face-to-face teaching, or, often, cases where library staff were not fully qualified teacher librarians. In such cases, the potential contribution of teacher librarians to supporting the development of subject curricula and the digital literacy of other staff and students, as well as keeping libraries' resources up to date, can be compromised. Much of the undervaluation of teacher librarians appears to arise from a lack of knowledge among employers and managers of the potential contribution of libraries and qualified staff to improved learning outcomes.

Our report contains 11 recommendations, which we believe will promote an awareness of the potential of teacher librarians to contribute to educational outcomes of Australian schools. Recommendations include the provision of a minimum level of access to online database resources in every Australian school and increasing awareness of the role that teacher librarians play, through the development of a discrete national policy statement that defines the importance of digital and information literacy. The committee also recommends a longitudinal study to establish the links between library programs and literacy, and a workforce gap analysis of teacher librarians in the Australian context. In addition, the presence of specialist teacher librarians at a school should be included on the MySchool website. These measures will raise the profile of the profession as well as serve to provide better information to families that make up school communities.

There is a stereotypical view of libraries as stuffy rooms full of never opened books and teacher librarians enforcing silence within their domain. This stereotype is in stark contrast to the potential for libraries to be a hub of activity, with teacher librarians putting students and staff in touch with the latest resources.

I would like to thank my committee colleagues, former members of the committee and the secretariat—in particular Glen Worthington and Sara Edson.

I commend the report to the House.