

BRIEFING PAPER

Statutory Provision of School Libraries

June 2017



“How many times does this point have to be made to ministers? Books matter. They inspire, they inform, they delight; they encourage independent thought, invention and empathy. At a time when public libraries are being closed down, and when hard-pressed families have ever less money to spend on books, it is absolutely vital that school libraries are made a priority, and that teachers are given every support in fostering literacy. The only way in which we will encourage our children to value reading is by demonstrably valuing it ourselves.”

Sarah Waters

The Society of Authors (SoA) urges that legislation be passed to ensure that there is a school library staffed by a trained librarian in every school and that school libraries are included in Ofsted inspections.

The SoA is a trade union for authors. The SoA was founded in 1884 and today has over 10,000 members writing in all areas of the profession (from novelists to doctors, textbook writers to ghost writers, broadcasters to academics, and illustrators to translators). Our members include many teachers, librarians *and* children’s writers.

Introduction

School libraries are not currently a statutory requirement in England and Wales and they are not recognised by Ofsted in its inspections. There is no requirement that a library has to be run by a dedicated and trained staff and over the last decade libraries and the use of School Libraries Services have been undervalued and neglected. This is in stark contrast to prisons where under The Prison Rules 1999 and Young Offender Institution Rules 1988 there is a statutory responsibility for each prison to have a library, and for prisoners to have facilities to use and exchange books. There are very specific obligations setting out the amount of stock and requirements for access.¹

How can it be right that our prisons must have libraries but not our schools? There is substantial evidence² that a school library with a trained professional to manage it and to inspire children to read has a huge positive effect on student outcomes and on reading attainment, practice and enjoyment. There is also huge evidence of the benefit to individuals of the habit of reading for pleasure. Without a dedicated librarian in a funded school library, many children simply do not have the opportunity. Well-off and well-educated families will find a way to bring their children to love reading but others do not and this widens the gap between the best and the least “well-educated” and “well-read”, a difference that is likely to be mirrored in economic success as well as in general wellbeing and mental health. Many children do not have access to public libraries – whether because of closures, restricted hours or because their parents do not visit them. Nor do they possess their own books – in December 2011 the National Literacy Trust released figures that of 3.8 million children in the UK, 1 in 3 do not own a book. Ten years ago only one child in ten was thought not to own a book.

Furthermore, libraries are key to teaching digital skills which will be necessary for everyone to work and access the world around them.

If the opportunity to become digitally literate, keen and expert readers is offered to prisoners, how can we deny it to our poorest children? The statutory specifications for prison libraries are detailed and caring. For children, nothing. This needs to change and that all primary and secondary schools should be required by law to have a library, and dedicated librarians should be compulsory in secondary schools and in all but the smallest primary schools. We recognise that a dedicated librarian may be an expensive resource to provide in very small primary schools, but at the very least a designated teacher must be given specialist training in such schools and a professional librarian appointed to oversee a cluster of such schools. There are proven links between reading

¹ All prisoners must be allowed access to library books and prisons must hold adequate stock. Library visits should be of a minimum 30 minutes' duration and as often as is practical at times that facilitate access by prisoners. Access must be at least once every two weeks as an absolute minimum.

² From Australia: school libraries boost literacy:

www.slj.com/2013/10/research/school-libraries-boost-student-literacy-australian-survey-finds/ and <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED482253.pdf>

From the US:

<http://search.proquest.com/openview/240ac1af46258f16460b4c6c923b44ad/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=6154>

Library Research Service (US):

<https://www.lrs.org/data-tools/school-libraries/impact-studies/>

Save the Children's Read On, Get On campaign:

www.savethechildren.org.uk/sites/default/files/images/Read_On_Get_On.pdf

and attainment, but guidance for teachers is essential. We cannot truly espouse universal creative entitlement unless we facilitate universal access to books and reading.

“In my view, you can’t call yourself a school if you don’t have a library”

Schools Minister Nick Gibb
February 2017

But don’t most schools have libraries and librarians?

School library provision is being drastically cut throughout UK schools – this is not new but is increasing in spread and severity. The Libraries All Party Parliamentary Group Report ‘The Beating Heart of the School’ reported that library budgets are being cut or frozen and the number of librarians in schools are falling. In 2012 there were 2,979 Full Time Equivalent librarians working in England’s 24,372 schools, meaning fewer than 15% of schools had a trained librarian. Sometimes these cuts come about through underfunding, loss of stock etc., and sometimes the library remains a space with some books and computers but the trained librarian hours are reduced or eliminated, so that it becomes nothing more than a room with books. A functioning library is more than that.

Effects of staffed school libraries

A properly valued and funded school library directly impacts students’ educational outcomes and development as creative, deep-thinking, empathetic, open-minded, informed individuals. It especially affects those students who for different reasons are unlikely to find these benefits elsewhere, through public library provision or at home. It also teaches digital skills and provides a safe environment both within and outside traditional school hours. In July 2011 the All Party Group for Education found in ‘Overcoming Barriers to Literacy’ that ‘the lack of a coherent support for school libraries and their proven impact early in children’s education is a huge anomaly’ and recommended that ‘every school should have a library’.

Literacy and reading attainment

School librarians affect reading attainment: children need to read in quantity while they are practising becoming readers but they will not do it in quantity if they do not enjoy it. Many will not find books they will enjoy reading without a librarian’s help.

As the government recognises, levels of illiteracy are alarmingly high. Progress in Literary Studies (PIRLS 2006) demonstrated that reading ability in UK schools was lower than that in many EU countries, and that reading for pleasure is declining.³ The UK’s position in international reading rankings (PISA) fell from 7th in 2000 to 25th in 2011. The problem is by no means limited to school children but is widespread in the academic high ground

³ http://timss.bc.edu/pirls2006/intl_rpt.html

of universities.⁴ That the UK is now only 25th in international reading rankings is scandalous given that we are privileged as Britons, speaking English, to be heir to the richest literary heritage in the world. For children to have the skills and desire to access that heritage (Shakespeare, Dickens, Milton... the roll call is immense) they need the building block of fluency in reading. The 2010 School Libraries Commission survey demonstrated that young people who read above the expected level for their age are twice as likely to be school library users as young people who read below their age.

Reading for pleasure

Reading and being read to for pleasure are habits which, increasingly, schools will need to actively instil in children. They can engender, better than almost anything else, an enquiring mind and a real capacity for deduction, empathy and extended concentration. Extended reading encourages a critical faculty, independent thinking, the ability to be more discriminating, to assess things in their own right and realise the value of the source.

If teachers are to inspire a love of reading, they need to be given more guidance to help them discover and choose suitable materials. In our research of PGCE teacher training courses we have found that there is very little or no dedicated time spent studying children's literature. Because of the percentage of time spent in teaching practice in schools and the perceived need to spend a large proportion of the course teaching hours on synthetic phonics, there is no time left for children's literature and reading for pleasure. We agree with Sir Michael Wilshaw's observation that *'...research confirms that many primary teachers... have very limited understanding of the world of literature, including good-quality contemporary literature'*. We also agree with his assertion that more training needs to be made available. This is something that can be helped by a knowledgeable and trained librarian.

Classrooms focus on subject-teaching (and rely on the library for support) but the librarian has the additional role of promoting reading for pleasure. This has well-established effects on attainment, vocabulary, knowledge, self-esteem, empathy and self-understanding, stress and wellbeing.⁵

Supporting the curriculum

School libraries managed by library professionals also support the curriculum, not just literacy and English. The new curriculum aspires to free up teachers to deliver engaging programmes of study. To achieve this, teachers need access to high quality and current literature and information resources. School librarians can access resources that are available, not only in school libraries, but in public libraries, archives, museums and local studies centres, as well as the resources for loan from the Schools Library Service. They are able to link these resources to the curriculum, helping teachers to introduce children to new learning experiences based on access to a wide range of content. The librarian

⁴ This is confirmed in the report *Writing Matters* published in 2006 by the Royal Literary Fund: www.rlf.org.uk/fellowshipscheme/research.cfm

⁵ Access to a staffed school library has a positive impact on mental wellbeing – Reading Agency Lit Review 2015

will also support the teacher in developing and/or refreshing their own knowledge of a subject. Through the librarian's knowledge, expertise and skills, children are taught how to access and explore for themselves all the school curriculum subject areas and beyond. This is particularly important for the large number of pupils who still do not have access to books and/or the internet at home. The new National Curriculum for England Framework Document states that every school should provide library facilities.

Digital skills

2.6 million UK adults lack basic digital skills and 5.9m people have never been online. Digital skills are now essential for every job, for shopping and even for accessing benefits so it is essential that children acquire digital skills from the earliest age. Library staff are very experienced and well-trained in providing digital skills support.⁶

In this age of 'fake news' and material written by those without expertise, we need even more to avoid simply taking information from the internet: we need trained adults to help young people find the truth that they seek and to avoid plagiarism.

A library, as a bank of knowledge, needs to be at the heart of every school. Children (and teachers) need a dedicated environment with adequate space, a range of current and appropriate books and other learning resources calibrated to support pupils' needs and the curriculum – not just a computer suite.

A safe and secure environment, open during and outside school hours

A child needs to enjoy learning in a safe and stimulating environment. Evidence suggests that the school library has a significant role to play for children who, for a variety of reasons, find the school environment particularly unwelcoming. School libraries also have a key role to play in extended school provision. A good school library has the resources and staffing to allow it to provide after school clubs, homework sessions and reading groups. These activities can be targeted at specific groups, such as pupils with English as an additional language, Gifted and Talented, looked-after children, carers and teenage parents. Library professionals can also develop the school as a hub of the community by building links with the public library service to support children's learning outside the classroom.⁷

"Study after study has shown how children who read for pleasure achieve significantly more, regardless of background, than those who don't. Those achievements are not just in terms of academic success but include social and emotional behaviour too. It makes sense then, to find as many ways of promoting reading for pleasure as possible. Let's have a library at the heart of every school and books at the heart of every library. Let's nurture generations of story-loving, fact-discovering, poetry-guzzling pupils and let's give

⁶ <https://librariestaskforce.blog.gov.uk/2015/12/17/digital-skills-partnerships-in-libraries> 2015

⁷ Beating Heart of the School report cited above.

teachers the tools and time to do it. I truly believe that if we do, educational standards in the UK will rocket."

**Helena Pielichaty, former Chair,
SoA Children's Writers and Illustrators Group.**

Ofsted Inspection

'*Making full use of the library and librarian*' is one of ten principles of good practice for raising literacy levels that have been set out by Ofsted in its 2013 report 'Improving Literacy in Secondary Schools'. Following visits to seven English secondary schools identified in inspections as effective in delivering cross-curricular improvement in literacy in schools, Ofsted concluded that: '*In every school in the survey there were successful measures to involve the library and ensure that the librarian had an important role in developing reading. This is common sense, building on the specialist knowledge that librarians possess. Where librarians are fully integrated into the management structure of the school, they have an opportunity to influence debate and to enhance the library's contribution to pupils' progress.*'⁸ Despite this and the fact that libraries are commended in their national reports, Ofsted is no longer required to look at a school's library provision when inspecting a school. A school can be judged as outstanding, but not have a school library. In practice Ofsted inspectors do not always visit the library: only 18 of the 163 respondents in our 2012 survey said that individual inspectors visited their library or had even commented on their reading strategies – although in Scotland inspections are required to include the library. We are also concerned that some schools, which run excellent initiatives, are not given due recognition for this achievement.

Schools' libraries as well as literacy strategies (including author events) should be specifically acknowledged by Ofsted in their reports. We believe that Ofsted should encourage schools to detail enrichment strategies such as Patrons of Reading, author residencies etc. in their pre-inspection self-evaluation forms and amend *The Ofsted School Inspection Handbook* to encourage inspections to automatically include the library and/or meet the librarian or literacy coordinator to discuss their provision.

Such a move would encourage schools nationwide to engage with libraries, literacy strategies, digital media and creative practitioners more frequently, especially if they knew that doing so would be validated by Ofsted.

Conclusion

What we need:

- A recognition that every good school must have a well-funded school library with a dedicated professional working in it. School libraries should be recognised as being necessarily at the heart of a school: a sine qua non, essential to good education and not an optional extra.

⁸ Improving Literacy in Secondary Schools, Ofsted, 2013

- School leaders, governors and all teaching staff should understand that the provision of a school library, with sufficient trained and funded professionals to run it, is at the centre of good educational provision.
- Ofsted should commit to giving weight to effective school library provision in inspections, noting where good library provision is aiding the school's success.
- Parents and students should recognise this, too, so that parents will ask the right questions about library provision when choosing a school and when they engage with the school. Students will express their pleasure and pride in their library, recognising what it does for them.
- School librarians should feel that their role is properly valued and feel able to ask for funding and support to help them further improve their school's library provision.

SCHOOL LIBRARIES AND LEARNING



VIA



LIBRARY COLLECTION & ACCESS

Providing large, high quality, multi-format reading & information collection in library, classroom, beyond school day. Encouraging library & information use.



LIBRARY NETWORKED TECHNOLOGY

Providing computers with internet & remote access to library catalogue & digital resources.



INSTRUCTION BY LIBRARIAN

Developing critical independent information users & enthusiastic readers.



COLLABORATION BETWEEN LIBRARIAN & TEACHERS

Planning, developing & evaluating instruction with teachers. Contributing to whole school priorities. Liaising with external colleagues & agencies. Supporting teacher professional development.

