

# **School Library Association**

## **REPUBLIC OF IRELAND**

# **POLICY STATEMENT**

SLARI believes there is an urgent need for the establishment of a comprehensive system of school libraries throughout the country, at both primary and post-primary level, in recognition of the following:

- the necessity for all students and teachers to have access to a wide range of information sources in an increasingly research - based system of education with a widening focus on self - directed learning
- the need to equip students for full participation in today's knowledge society
- the importance of developing students' information literacy or information handling skills
- the vital role of the school library in encouraging young people to develop good reading habits

### **The Case for School Libraries**

There is a comprehensive body of work to support the case for school libraries. This includes:

#### **International Work**

- the report by the UK Libraries All Party Parliamentary Group on improving educational attainment through school libraries and librarians (2014)
- *Impact of School Libraries on Learning*, by Williams, Wavell & Morrison, RGU Aberdeen (2012), the critical review of published evidence on school libraries to inform the Scottish education community
- several US based studies, among the more recent being the 2012 study of Keith Curry Lance & B. Schwarz, *How Pennsylvania School Libraries Pay Off*, the major conclusion of which is that there is overwhelming evidence that students are more likely to succeed academically where they have school library programs that are better staffed, better funded, better equipped, better stocked, and more accessible
- major studies in this field as outlined in the 2010 position paper of the CISSL (Centre for International Scholarship in School Libraries, New Jersey) by its Director, Dr Ross Todd

- a series of surveys conducted by Softlink, a supplier of school library management systems, of school libraries around Australia in 2010, 2011 and 2013, showing links between: higher school library funding and higher than national average reading scores; and lower school library funding and lower than national average reading scores
- international PISA studies of the literacy competencies of Irish 15-year-olds, that identify a link between access to books and literacy

### **Irish Based Studies**

These include:

- JCSP publications *Room for Reading* (2005), *More Than A Room For Reading* (2008) and *Time to Read* (2006) which showcase best practice and highlight the benefits of a library on all aspects of student development.
- *Reading Literacy in Irish Schools: A Comparative Analysis* (1994) by Dr Mark Morgan and Michael Martin
- The 2008 Price Waterhouse Cooper *Report on Good Practice in Numeracy and Literacy in the UK and Ireland* (2008) which includes recommendations on the resourcing and staffing of school libraries for more effective Literacy & Numeracy education
- *A Joint Report by the Education and Training Inspectorate and the Department of Education and Skills Inspectorate on promoting and Improving Literacy in Post-Primary Schools* (2015) which includes reference to use of library classes and library time
- *A Balanced Approach to Literacy Development in the Early Years by the National Educational Psychological Service: NEPS Good Practice Guide* (2015) which recommends that all early years schools should have both classroom libraries and a well stocked school library

### **Provision of School Libraries: International Policy**

The UN and the EU, both of which Ireland is a member, have published policy documents in relation to the access of young people to libraries:

- The UN Declaration on the Rights of the Child commits signatories to ensuring children have access to information and material from a diversity of sources, and to publishing and disseminating children's books (Article 17).
- The School Library Manifesto of UNESCO/ IFLA (The joint International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) declares that:

“The school library is essential to every long-term strategy for literacy, education, information provision and economic, social and cultural development. As the responsibility of local,

regional and national authorities, it must be supported by specific legislation and policies. School Libraries must have adequate and sustained funding for trained staff, materials, technologies and facilities”

- The Final Report of the EU High Level Group of Experts on Literacy (2012) includes among its recommendations the provision of “reading corners” in schools, and the provision of appropriate, appealing reading materials in school libraries

## **School Libraries in Ireland**

**We acknowledge and welcome some official recognition of the role of school libraries through the following developments:**

- The Primary School Curriculum: English (Language) makes repeated references to learning outcomes centred around the school library
- The JCA English curriculum includes the Key Skill of Managing Information
- Composite Reports published by the Department of Education and Skills (DES) Inspectorate on the teaching of English, Modern Languages, and History, in second level schools, refer to the role of the school library as a resource and to best practice in relation to the use of the school library
- The DES has published Circulars and Guidelines on Reading, and on Book Choice
- The JCSP Programme provides funding to schools participating in JCSP for the development of a Reading Corner
- The JCSP Programme also occasionally provides access to CPD on school librarianship to staff in participating schools
- The DES funds the highly successful and effective Junior Certificate School Programme Demonstration Library Project.

**Against these developments, however, we have concerns about the way in which the following developments are resulting in the loss of opportunities to advance official recognition for school libraries:**

- DES funding to schools has been cut, thus reducing the pool of funding from which schools might be able to draw on to provide school library services
- funding for Book Grants has been cut, thus reducing a financial resource that has been used to provide reading materials for a school’s library
- the moratorium on the appointment of teachers to Posts of Responsibility is resulting in the discontinuation of Library Posts of Responsibility; such Posts had been a way of supporting the development of and access to libraries in schools
- there is no specific reference in *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life*, the National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy (2011-2020), to the highly effective contribution the school library has in developing literacy skills
- Suspension of JCSP Demonstration Library Project at 30 instead of the proposed 50 libraries
- Library staff in schools are being denied access to CPD relevant to their roles on the basis that they do not have Teaching Council Registration Numbers

- DES Circular 42/2015 fails to recognize and support the current provision of libraries in schools and the good practices they engage in.

**STATUTORY RECOGNITION:** the Education Act of 1998 makes no reference to school libraries. SLARI calls on the Government to legislate for the establishment of a nation-wide system of school libraries.

**FINANCE:** a substantial and ongoing commitment by the government to the development and maintenance of primary and post primary school libraries throughout the country is essential.

Realistic and regular funding is essential, and until there is official provision for the employment of qualified librarians to serve **all** schools within the education system, it will not be possible to properly fulfil the central and crucial role which school libraries have the potential to occupy within that system.

Government investment in information technology for schools strengthens the case for funding the kind of school library provision which will help to ensure the effective use of this information technology

**EVIDENCE BASED PLANNING:** there are no recent quantitative figures that show the number of schools that have school library provision in Ireland, and no details of the nature of that provision where it does exist. In keeping with best practice in school planning and policy development, SLARI calls on the DES to undertake and/or support research to establish this information.

## **PRIMARY SCHOOLS**

There is no funding from the Department of Education and Skills to provide for libraries in primary schools. The capitation grant that was given to each public library authority towards a School Library Service for primary schools was abolished in 2008.

Some newer primary schools have a room for use as a library, but often owing to pressure of space this is also used for other purposes.

There may be a teacher with a post of responsibility for the library who manages the library, but this proves difficult as they have no allocated time to do this job. Many primary schools rely on voluntary help from parents to run the school library. Often if a primary school is in close proximity to a public library, it is used instead of a dedicated library within the school.

Many primary schools have classroom libraries – while these have a valuable role in the school they should not be seen as substituting for a central library. A policy for the provision of proper library premises, staffing, library management system and budget for materials for all primary schools, new and old, is urgently required.

## **POST-PRIMARY SCHOOLS**

The situation at second level, where anecdotal evidence suggests that in many cases no school library service exists, is most unsatisfactory. The option available to post primary schools to use a proportion of their funding towards providing space for a school library is unrealistic in the absence of ongoing funding for a library service, and is seldom used to good effect, if at all.

Today's second level students need the support which can be offered by an effective and dynamic school library, to help them with all aspects of their development and in particular with the development of independent learning and research skills. The demands of today's post-primary curriculum are such that each post primary school library would require a substantial annual budget in order to fulfil its role as a central information resource.

## **EQUALITY OF ACCESS FOR ALL STUDENTS**

It is remarkable that in spite of the poor state of official school library provision described above, there are many boards of management, school principals, teachers, librarians and parents who through dedication, fund-raising, hard work and sheer determination have managed to provide a high quality library service in a relatively small number of schools throughout the country.

Many of these people are members of SLARI, and in acknowledging their enormous contribution we must also insist that **every** school pupil in this country is entitled to receive this high quality service, and that the resources necessary for such school library provision must be built into our education system.

## **INFORMATION LITERACY/INFORMATION HANDLING SKILLS**

The teaching of Information Literacy should be an essential component of any school curriculum and should be delivered at all stages of the school programme (ie. at senior as well as junior level). A school which has a well organised library has the best chance of delivering a successful information literacy programme.

Such a programme should help students at all levels to become informed library users and independent learners, and to competently manage information. They should learn how to identify and locate sources of information; to organise, record, present and evaluate information effectively. It is particularly important that students master these skills in preparation for third level studies.

In line with international best practice, an information literacy programme should be devised and taught by a team which would include the school librarian and members of the teaching staff.

## **READING FOR LEISURE AND FOR LIFE**

The school library has a crucial role to play in encouraging students to develop a lifelong interest in books and reading.

A thriving fiction section should be at the heart of every school library. Other areas outside the formal curriculum, including hobbies, extra-curricular activities and aspects of personal and social development should also be catered for.

## **LITERACY AND NUMERACY**

OECD PISA reports highlight the link between access to books and development of literacy skills. Research reports on school library provision also recommend how the school library contributes to a culture of numeracy and supports numeracy education. It is regrettable that no specific reference to the role of school libraries in developing literacy skills is included in the DES Strategy on Literacy and Numeracy. SLARI is disappointed that the interim review of the Strategy published in 2016 has not recognized this omission.

## **EMOTIONAL LITERACY**

As it is now widely recognized that reading contributes to the development of emotional intelligence and to the ability to empathise with others, the school library provides an important resource that supports the personal and emotive development of students. A well-resourced, well managed library, with a trained staff, working with the school's management and teaching staff, has a role to play in providing access to and use of reading materials that promote openness, tolerance, and respect for diversity.

## **INCLUSION AND EQUALITY**

The recent *Final Report of the EU High Level Group of Experts on Literacy* outlines the links between poverty and poor literacy levels. Emerging research (for instance that of Keith Curry Lance as already mentioned, or that of Stephen Krashen in *Why Invest in Libraries?* 2014) argues that school libraries can make up for the educational disadvantage of poverty in literacy and provide inclusion and equality of access and opportunity.

## **INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY**

SLARI considers ICT facilities to be an essential feature of any modern school library.

The Internet and digital sources of information have an important role to play in complementing other sources of information. Computerised library management systems

should be used in school libraries to enhance information and data retrieval, and also for ordering, cataloguing and circulation of material.

SLARI is disappointed to note that in the *Digital Strategy for Schools 2015 – 2020* there is no acknowledgement of the key role school libraries could play in embedding ICT and the acquisition of Key Skills in school practice. (and indeed do play in a small number of schools insofar as the very limited resources at their disposal allow).

While SLARI members are very aware of the necessity for today's schools to be able to provide the most modern, efficient, reliable ICT its students and teachers, we are also concerned about the effectiveness of pumping considerable funds for ICT into schools which up to now have not even had the basic resource of a school library. The 2015 PISA OECD Study, *Students, Computers and Learning: Making the Connection* reports that "if current gaps in reading, writing and mathematics skills are not narrowed, inequalities in digital skills will persist". While the *Digital Strategy for Schools* outlines a carefully planned, structured approach for the embedding of ICT in schools, SLARI is of the view that a well-stocked, well resourced, and well organised school library remains a necessary setting for facilitating access to all types of information sources, printed and electronic.

## **SCHOOL LIBRARIES ENHANCE LEARNING OUTCOMES**

International research shows that the quality of students' learning outcomes is greatly enhanced by effective school libraries.

All learners in each country in Europe are entitled to quality school library/media centres and services.

In order to achieve this, each country in Europe, and the European Union, should adopt the principles of the IFLA\*/UNESCO School Library Manifesto." – *European Network for School Libraries and Information Literacy (2003)*

\*International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions

## **STAFFING**

It is vital that every school, both primary and post-primary, should have access to the services of a professionally qualified librarian in its school library. It is very important that a national policy for the recruitment, remuneration and conditions of employment of school librarians be put in place as part of a wider policy on school library provision. Such a policy should be agreed following consultation with all relevant parties, including SLARI.

The Department of Science & Skills should provide relevant CPD for any teachers who continue to hold school library related Posts of Responsibility. Modules on all aspects of school librarianship, including information literacy skills and how to impart these skills should feature in initial teacher education for primary and post-primary teachers. Library staff in schools

should be considered frontline educational staff and not be precluded from any relevant CPD that would enhance their role on the basis that they do not have a Teaching Council registration number.

### **SUPPORT CURRENTLY AVAILABLE**

School library staff are encouraged to join organisations such as SLARI, Children's Books Ireland and the Youth Library Group of the Library Association of Ireland. Organisations such as these publish information and organise events which will help to keep librarians and teachers in touch with current developments in school librarianship and/or literature for young people.

SLARI, 2016

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