

SCHOOL LIBRARIES SHARE



WHAT THE SCHOOL LIBRARY SURVEY HAS TAUGHT ME

Jen Sheridan, Softlink Education, explores the need to promote the different skills and services offered by school libraries. This article was previously published in Term 2 "SCIS Connections", republished with permission.

Since 2015, I have had the privilege of collating comments made in the Softlink School Library Survey.

While the survey looks at statistical information, such as budgets and staffing, it also provides an opportunity for school library staff to share their thoughts about working in a school library.

Over the years, I have learnt so much from these comments that have been so generously shared. I would like to highlight a few of these key learnings.

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MORE NEEDS TO BE DONE TO PROMOTE THE WORK THAT SCHOOL LIBRARY STAFF DO, AND WHAT THEY CAN OFFER.

The school library is a haven for students and a place to discover a love of reading (more on that later!); this I knew during my school years.

What hadn't occurred to me as a student is that this doesn't happen by accident but through the hard work and heart of the committed staff that work in school libraries. This has been highlighted to me through comments shared, many of which have been collated in these feature documents: softlinkint.com/blog/softlinks-school-library-survey-feature-documents.

What has become even more evident through the survey are the information skills that I learnt, but undervalued. I never imagined I would need them outside the school essay writing and research context. I was wrong. In this digital age where there is a proliferation of information available online, the need to disseminate and critically analyse information that flashes across my screen has become vital to daily life. Unfortunately, I think very little is known about the specific skills school library staff, 'information specialists', can offer.

Here are just a few comments from the survey:

'Instead of collaborating with only those who choose to work with the teacher librarian I'd like the school to build intentional, curriculum-based teaching programmes that incorporate information and digital literacy, literary competencies, future learning skills (21st-century skills), and inquiry learning.' – **Australia 2020**

'We live in a digital world. Research and information literacy skills need to be on the curriculum and on the timetable. I would like to be involved in preparing our students for living/working in the digital age.' – **Ireland 2018**

'It would be nice to have more time with the students. By the time they graduate, I want them ready for university, being able to sit down and research anything, and write about it in a concise, professional manner.' – **USA 2020**

SCHOOL LIBRARIES NEED MORE FUNDING.

With limited budgets and competing demands, it can be difficult for school leadership to choose where the funding should go. I understand that.

But the school library has great potential to be the centre for research, learning and reading, and can contribute significantly to learning outcomes and prepare students for lifelong learning and critical thinking.

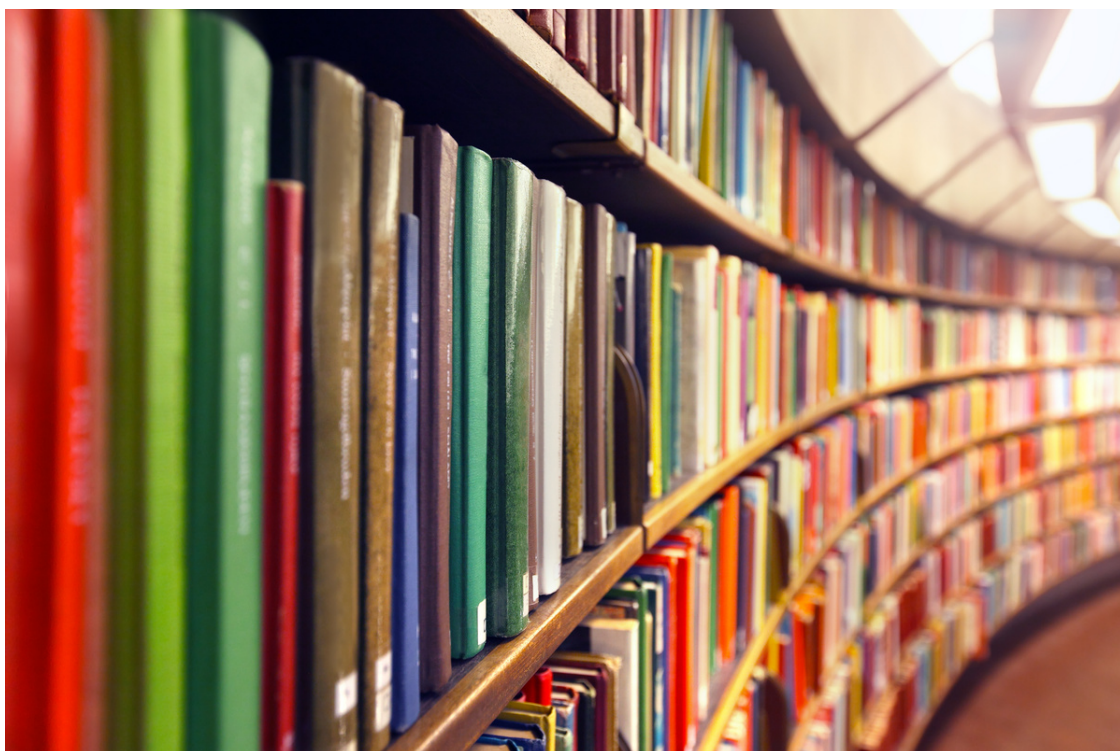
The school library is an important investment in the future of our students.

Lack of funding is a repeated theme throughout the comments. What stands out is not just repeated requests for funding, but the specific needs that staff are looking to meet. What is inspiring to me is the innovation of school library staff, and what they are able to accomplish with what they have, as has been shared in the Blog softlinkint.com/blog/school-libraries-share-innovative-ideas.

'I would love to be able to update my library's digital resources and its furnishings to provide a more welcoming environment for all, and a great hub for our school's learning environment.' – **Australia 2019**

'I would update our aged and very large collection. I've slowly been curating a more modern, quality collection, but the lack of funds is restrictive.' – **Australia 2019**

'I would like more money in order to be able to purchase relevant resources.' – **United Kingdom 2018**



READING FOR PLEASURE IS WHERE IT'S AT.

As an avid reader, you can imagine my horror when my nearly 6-year-old daughter told me reading was pointless. I just couldn't imagine someone not loving books! I set out to show her the point of reading in all the logical ways: menus, invitations – I even got STEAM kits with instruction books! But you know, you cannot get far into the survey comments without 'reading for pleasure' being mentioned. How could I, after six years, miss that part of the equation?

So, I began reading my childhood favourites to her every night. *Charlotte's Web* for the win!

She is now 7 and is 'super excited' that she is allowed to borrow 'five whole books from the school library!' Literacy is an essential skill. And reading for pleasure is where that starts.

'I have worked at this school for 20 years. When I started we had a teacher librarian. She inspired the children to read and discussed books with them. We no longer have a teacher librarian and the literacy levels of students has dropped hugely.' – **Australia 2020**

'I want students to read for pleasure more. Data shows the more they read, the better the test scores.' – **USA 2020**

'Schools need to connect the dots – literacy and library education/love of reading are linked.' – **Australia 2020**



AND FINALLY ...

We need to continue to provide an avenue for school library staff to have their voice heard.

From the 2018 survey:

‘Outside our own library, I’m very aware of school libraries being closed or deprofessionalised and it concerns me greatly. It’s long overdue for governments to realize the value of libraries staffed by qualified librarians and I hope the #GreatSchoolLibraries campaign will make a big impact.’ –

United Kingdom

‘Thank you for this survey. We need evidence like this so we can continue to “fight” for the importance of this position in our schools. A school library is a special and important space and every student should have access to a trained teacher librarian and a well-resourced collection. I have been a TL for 33 years and I seem to have been part of this fight for at least 30 of those years.’ – **Australia**

HOW CAN YOU HAVE YOUR VOICE HEARD?

1. Join one of the fantastic campaigns advocating for school libraries.

1. **Australia:** Students Need School Libraries (studentsneedschoollibraries.org.au, Twitter: @NeedSchoolLibs)
- **New Zealand:** School Libraries Transform (schoollibrariestransform.org.nz Twitter: @weneedschoollib)
- **United Kingdom:** Great School Libraries (greatschoollibraries.org.uk, Twitter: @GreatSchLibs)

2. Share this video to promote the value of school libraries: softlinkint.com/resource-details/video-great-school-libraries.

3. Participate in the annual Softlink School Library Survey for an opportunity to have your comments shared in our feature articles – follow Twitter @SoftlinkEdu for opening dates.

4. Share this article to help get the message out.

Softlink is proud to support school libraries through annual school library surveys.

To date we have produced 12 feature documents around the themes of challenges school libraries face, opportunities, trending topics, innovative ideas, promoting the library, collaboration and more.