

What are the top

7

CHALLENGES

FOR SCHOOL LIBRARIES?



Introduction

Softlink conducted the fifth annual Australian School Library Survey in September 2014, and received a record 1,380 responses. As part of the survey, respondents were asked what they would like to change about their library or role. It became clear that there are a number of challenges being shared by library staff all over the country.

These challenges are presented in this document, with a report on the results of the 2014 Australian School Library Survey scheduled for release in February 2015.

The 7 Challenges For School Libraries

Challenge 1 - **Managing a library that wasn't built for the 21st century**

Over 20% of respondents indicated that the physical features of the library, including the size, layout and fittings, pose a challenge for them.

Challenge 2 - **Finding enough time to do it all**

Over 20% of respondents commented that they would like to dedicate more time to administration and planning in order to improve the library's services.

Challenge 3 - **Encouraging the school community to value the library**

Almost 15% of respondents raised concerns about the under-utilisation of the resources and services available and the school community's attitude towards the library.

Challenge 4 - **Aligning the library with the curriculum**

Almost 14% of the respondents want to increase the opportunities for teachers and library staff to work together on developing and delivering programs that are aligned to the curriculum.

Challenge 5 - **Getting people to understand what library staff do**

With library's evolving, over 12% of respondents commented that the school community is sometimes confused about the roles and responsibilities of library staff.

Challenge 6 - **Accessing enough help**

Human resourcing was also mentioned as a challenge for over 12% of the respondents.

Challenge 7 - **Keeping up with the digital age**

Just under 12% of the respondents would like improve the technology being used within and offered by their library.

Challenge 1 - Managing a library that wasn't built for the 21st century

Over 44% of Australian school libraries are over 20 years old¹ which creates a challenge for library staff that are trying to implement 21st century learning spaces. Library staff report that they are frustrated by small spaces with inflexible layouts that are outdated and poorly furnished.

While eBooks and digital resources can help to alleviate collection space issues, library staff would like more interactive space within their libraries.

"We desperately need more room and flexible areas/furniture so that we can meet the increasing demands for the diverse uses by students, staff and classes"

"I would like to provide learning spaces for many types of groups with facilities for all types of learning"

"I would like to have the library as a central place where students, teachers and the community come together to share literature, read and learn"

"The library is very cramped with not enough space for students to study or to develop collections"

"I would like to revamp the inside of the library to make it more appealing and functional but due to financial constraints this probably won't happen"

Challenge 2 - Finding enough time to do it all

The second challenge for school libraries is time. Teacher Librarians report that they are increasingly responsible for providing relief teaching in their schools, resulting in reduced administration and innovation time. Respondents reported that these time pressures are impacting on their ability to develop the library and to collaborate with teaching staff.

"I would prefer additional days to work on library administration, acquisitions etc. Not enough time during the day!!!"

"There needs to be more non-contact time allocated to efficiently deal with the ever-increasing amounts of administrative tasks that have come with the growing student numbers over the recent years"

"Greater time for both myself and fellow staff in order to maintain and provide an up-to-date and flexible learning environment in which students and teacher are active learners"

"I would not be in a relief role - I would be in the library full time (including time to meet with each teaching team member for planning). This would enable me to work on inquiry programs with children at all times through out the day"

"My time is taken up by being placed into classrooms as a relief Integration Aide. Sessions in the library are then limited and involve classes coming to use the one computer terminal which means I cannot do my admin duties properly"

"I would like to spend more time in the library and less time doing "other" things outside the library or front office"

Challenge 3 - Encouraging the school community to value the library

Despite evidence that school libraries have a positive impact on student achievement (Lonsdale, 2003²), many staff feel that the library is undervalued by the school community. Library staff are frustrated that the school community isn't making full use of the library resources and services available to them.

"We waste a lot of time explaining what the library does in terms of enrichment and support for teachers and students, but a few people refuse to believe that libraries have changed and ask us to conform to outmoded models of libraries and information services"

"The school library is a fantastic resource that is under utilised by the teaching staff"

"I want to encourage students and teachers to use all of the resources more often"

"I'd like to see a change in how the Library and Library staff are perceived and respected by staff. When that changes, the trickle effect will extend to students. Then that will have a much bigger impact on the school overall as the Library and its staff will become relevant and the hub of the school"

Challenge 4 - Aligning the library with the curriculum

Teacher Librarians are frustrated by the lack of opportunities for collaborative teaching and ability to contribute to curriculum development and delivery within their schools.

"I would love to have more time with teachers to collaboratively plan activities in the Library. As it is mostly RFF, I try to align information skills with stage and class topics and immerse each child in literature"

"I would prefer to teach collaboratively with teachers, particularly when they are doing research based projects"

"I would have a more hands on role in helping to implement digital literacy programs and have a closer liaison with teachers concerning curriculum requirements and resources needed"

"I would like to be viewed as part of the learning process, and play an important role in the development of programs and planning"

"I would like to be actively involved in planning sessions with each team at the start of their Inquiry planning"



Challenge 5 - Getting people to understand what library staff do

Library staff report that it is a challenge to get everyone in the school community to understand what it is they do, and the value they deliver. Some also feel that the traditional title of Teacher Librarian doesn't accurately represent everything they do anymore as the role and environment continue to evolve.

"The name teacher-librarian needs an update but not sure what would best represent this changing role"

"Our Library is now a 'Learning Hub' staffed by 'learning specialists'. As a qualified Teacher Librarian I am not required in this new space and currently in the Classroom teaching maths. I would like to be recognised as the Information Specialist and would like to work with the new staff, not be replaced by them"

"More recognition for the fact that I am not just a 'library officer'"

"(Our consortia) does not have a classified position of "teacher librarian", "library manager" etc - we are still just "teachers" under the award. I don't think this really reflects our full role, and doesn't imply any particular sense of security either"

"To be seen as a TEACHER librarian not a library administrative staff and have this role facilitated through school organisation and decision making"

Challenge 6 - Accessing enough help

The Inquiry into School Libraries and Teacher Librarians in Australian Schools³ heard that the provision of support staff for school libraries is shrinking. Comments from library staff in the 2014 Australian School Library Survey show that these human resources challenges are impacting on the services that the library can provide to the school community.

"I wish we could have a qualified and motivated Teacher Librarian who could direct library services across our two campuses and take a more active role in student instruction/education of resource access"

"An increase in staffing would allow us to meet the diverse needs we have identified. We are increasingly being placed at the centre of the implementation and support of General Capabilities- literacy, numeracy, critical and creative thinking, ICT- a few more hands on deck would be useful"

"The amount of administration assistance needs to be increased to support the running of a very busy library in a large school"

"Additional assistant time would allow professional staff to focus more on collection development and teaching staff resourcing"



Challenge 7 - Keeping up with the digital age

Libraries need to embrace new ways of operating with ICT-based learning to help students prepare for the world of the future (Hough, 2011⁴), but library staff are facing the challenge of keeping up with new technology within their resources and organisational frameworks.



"Increased funding to incorporate digital devices and resources which would enable the library to move forward with the current digital trends"

"I would introduce more eBooks and digital resources and intend to do so in the new year"



"Support with technology - often the government network blocks the use of many suitable websites we use in conjunction with our Guided Inquiry lessons"

"I would have more computers, so that a whole class can work without sharing a computer, and access to mobile technology devices to use in lessons"



"I would love to have all our resources catalogued and the ability for everyone to access information about our library resources from their own devices, to be able to accurately record where these items are held within the school and for students to be able to borrow without having to physically attend the library to use the cataloguing system"

Continue reading to find out how Softlink is helping school libraries overcome these challenges



References

- ¹ The Australian School Libraries Research Project, 2008
- ² Lonsdale, M (2003), *Impact of School Libraries on Student Achievement: a review of the research*
- ³ "School libraries and teacher librarians in 21st century Australia" (March 2011)
- ⁴ Hough, M (2011), "Libraries as iCentres: helping schools", *ACCESS*, Vol. 25, Issue 1, pp. 5-9.

How can Softlink help school libraries overcome these challenges?

The Softlink Australian School Library Survey was initiated in 2010 to represent the industry's value in the parliamentary 'Inquiry into School Libraries and Teacher Librarians.'

Since then we have continued to represent the industry and to support the people we work with on a daily basis by conducting the survey annually. In the past key findings have been reported by ASLA, ALIA and other state school library associations to support their advocacy efforts.

The 2014 School Library Report will be released to education decision makers, industry associations and networks to advocate the role of school libraries and teacher librarians.

Softlink's latest Knowledge, Content and Library Management System, Oliver v5 can also help to alleviate 5 of the 7 challenges identified in this whitepaper.

Saving time with Oliver v5 (Challenge 2).

Functionality such as automated cataloguing, streamlined circulation and cataloguing workflow can save library staff hours of work if these tasks are being performed manually. Oliver v5 can also produce advanced reports and statistics, which, once set up, can be activated with the click of a button, every week, or month, or whenever reporting is required. Overdue notices and alerts for reserved items are also automated, which can significantly reduce school library administration requirements.

Promoting the role of the library and library staff with Oliver v5 (Challenges 3 and 5).

Librarians can engage the school community with an Oliver v5 library home page that includes embedded videos, photos, RSS feeds, book carousels, ratings and reviews and cover images. Book clubs, competitions and other events can be promoted as well as standard library services. Library staff can also use results from the advanced reporting tools available in Oliver v5 to educate, inform, or advocate to school decision makers.

Combining libraries and school curriculums with Oliver v5 (Challenge 4).

Oliver v5 allows teachers and library staff to identify and manage resources between departments, supporting student learning, lesson planning and resource sharing. Library staff can also share course lists and reading material with students through Oliver v5.

Future-proofing school libraries with Softlink and Oliver v5 (Challenge 7).

Oliver v5 is continually developed and innovated by the largest library software development and support team in the Southern Hemisphere. It is fully web-based and compatible with mobile devices, so users can access the library 24/7 from school, home or on the go. It provides integration with popular teaching tools, virtual learning environments, subscription databases, other digital media and student management systems. Oliver v5 provides deep digital integration with eBooks, enabling students to borrow and download titles without leaving their search page. Oliver v5's latest junior and middle school student interface Orbit, allows students to personalise their learning environment with cool backgrounds, avatars and colour schemes. Softlink has developed school library software for 30 years and will continue to provide the most innovative solutions and functionality for the future.

