

# The *Ongoing* Importance of School Libraries

School library professionals reflect on changes in the library environment

*Oliver*<sup>v5</sup>

Softlink

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Softlink is proud to support school libraries through the annual school library survey, conducted in Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom. The survey provides findings on school library funding, staffing, evolving roles, delivery of digital resources and visions for the future.

## Introduction

The library landscape in general, including school libraries, has changed significantly in the last two decades. School library staff and leaders have seen a momentous shift in the services and resources they offer and the evolution continues.

While this can be challenging at times, the truly inspiring thing is how well school libraries and library leaders have adapted. Across the globe library professionals and advocates have identified new opportunities for sharing, innovated access to resources, delivered digital programs, repurposed their spaces and proven, once and for all, the ongoing importance of school libraries.

Extensive research, including a number of reports referenced at the end of this document, provides evidence of the educational value of a well-resourced school library.

In this feature we highlight the voice of real school librarians globally, with comments drawn from the 2015 and 2016 Softlink School Library Surveys\* (Australia, New Zealand and United Kingdom).

Whether in the form of reflection, great ideas, adaptive challenges or simply celebration of success, these comments provide great insight into the workings of a 21st century school library.

Softlink is proud to collate these global comments within this feature document. Additional feature documents, with comments drawn from Softlink's Australian and New Zealand School Library surveys, are available through the Resources page on the Softlink web site.

\* Softlink has conducted school library surveys in Australia since 2010, and in recent years, extended the scope of the survey to include New Zealand and the United Kingdom.

Initially a response to the 2010 Australian Federal Government request for submissions to the 'Inquiry into school libraries and Teacher Librarians in Australian schools', the survey enabled Softlink to provide data which informed a unique response to the Inquiry.

Since then, Softlink has continued to survey school libraries annually, helping to build a critical reference point for understanding changes, impacts, and trends over time while providing a solid basis for school library advocacy.

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# 1. Being a 21st century library professional

The 21st century school library professional is a digital leader, an innovator, a creator, a promoter, a resource and research specialist, a curriculum adviser, and much more.

In this section, respondents reflect on the dynamics of the contemporary school library, their changing roles and the exciting opportunities and challenges they have faced along the way.

'This is an exciting time to be in libraries. Change is constant and a challenge to many, but there are so many opportunities to make new types of resources available to our users. Who knows what we will be doing in ten years' time? That is both exciting and a little scary, but I say "Bring it on"! **AU 2015**

'The biggest challenge for school libraries in general is that teachers often don't understand what the librarian can do to support their work.' **UK 2015**

'Let's just say it has been a great 30 years in this profession, at a time when many changes and expectations could have derailed us...on the contrary, we are more important to our communities than ever.' **AU 2015**

'School libraries have the potential to become the lifeblood of the school.' **UK 2015**

'Through both resources and spaces, libraries have a huge positive effect on teaching and learning.' **AU 2016**

'I think there are great ideas emerging from school librarians that show a new vitality in the role.' **UK 2015**

'Being a TL is the most satisfying work I have done.' **AU 2016**

'I strongly feel that libraries play a very important role and simply seeing the enjoyment of my class when it's their library day is enough to confirm its importance to me.' **NZ 2016**

'My challenge is a lack of awareness of the specific expertise which librarians can bring to schools.' **UK 2016**

'I would like teaching staff to make better use of us.' **NZ 2015**

'I think libraries are wonderful places and I know that our school library will continue to be a place of research and study using all aids to the students success.' **NZ 2015**

'If we have a 'value added' approach to education, then a librarian is good value for money!' **UK 2016**

'I love my job and love the interaction that I have with the kids and teachers - it's awesome. It's very busy but I like being busy!!!' **NZ 2016**

'I am happy with my role. The balance between teaching and learning, leadership, curriculum involvement, management, literature promotion and services is just right.' **AU 2016**

'I love being a Teacher Librarian, and having the opportunity to make a difference in the lives of all students.' **AU 2015**



# 75%

of students have no idea how to locate articles and resources they need for their research\*

# 60%

don't verify the accuracy or reliability of the research they find\*

'Librarians play a key role in the development of transferable skills. That cannot be underestimated, nor overstated.' **UK 2015**

'I am going to actively work to promote the library & services to the staff. Many staff are surprised by what we offer & what we do.' **AU 2015**

'Libraries are based upon building up knowledge bases, resource collections, and of course relationships over a period of time.' **UK 2015**

'Libraries are more crucial now than ever before and we need to ensure we are communicating this at every opportunity and to anyone who will listen. We must also be prepared to re-think how we operate in our environments to align with the new modern learning environments in schools.' **NZ 2015**

'Every school needs a school library and every child is entitled to a well resourced school library with qualified personnel.' **AU 2015**

'School librarians are as creative and proactive in promoting their work as ever, but our increasing use of social media is leading to new partnerships and projects that highlight the impact we can have on teaching and learning. I see the future as one of greater resource sharing and partnerships beyond our traditional school ones.' **UK 2015**

'I think librarians need to be connected with what the whole school is doing rather than seen as a separate entity working in isolation.' **NZ 2016**

## 2. Navigating the digital landscape

School library professionals play a vital role in helping students and faculty focus their research in a growing digital landscape. They teach students how to locate the best resources and, more importantly, how to assess and analyse the information they find.

In this section, respondents comment on the role they play in navigating the digital landscape.

'Future dependence on online information suggests librarians have a role to play in helping students understand and assimilate knowledge.' **UK 2015**

'I have been developing and implementing Information and Digital Literacy programs over last two years. I run these for students in Years 8 and 10 during fortnightly classes.' **AU 2016**

'There is more and more information online and the ability to sift through it is important. This does not come naturally to the students.' **NZ 2015**

At least

70%

of school librarians provide information literacy instruction\*



‘Dedicated librarians have evolved in a relatively short period of time to acquire sophisticated computer skills, which allow them to promote and teach good research skills and information literacy to others. Yes anyone can do a Google search and find some results. The skill is in assimilating, synthesising, analysing, understanding and comparing these results, as well as knowing where else to look. This is what a qualified and experienced librarian can do well.’

**UK 2016**

‘I create lesson plans for teaching staff supporting new topics and use these as a basis for teaching students how to access databases and how to search the internet well.’

**NZ 2016**

‘The biggest challenge is the perception that all information is online and that today’s students, as digital “natives”, are highly skilled at finding and using information. They are not - this is a learned/taught skill.’

**UK 2015**

‘An exciting trend that could impact libraries in the near future is eResources and equipping students with greater & more efficient searching techniques.’

**UK 2015**

‘We are encouraging use of online databases and teaching digital literacy. It is very exciting to have so much information available and a challenge to find targeted information suitable for every level.’

**NZ 2015**

‘When I started out (a long time ago) the challenge was finding information. Now the challenge is finding the best relevant information.’

**UK 2016**

‘Changes in technology are always paramount. However, there is a concerted move towards the library playing a direct role in the best use of this technology and the ability of students to access good quality information. Libraries continue to have a valuable role to play in assisting teachers and students to become information literate.’

**AU 2016**

‘School libraries do need to provide access to information in many forms and cannot afford to ignore digital/ electronic developments that affect the way people want to access information. Librarians offer valuable guidance and support to people as they research/read for work or enjoyment.’

**UK 2015**

‘I would like to focus more on providing information literacy skills and digital citizenship teaching, as well as supporting teachers with collated digital and physical resources.’

**NZ 2015**

‘Last year we surveyed staff around the areas of Information Literacy and Digital Citizenship. This year we have used this data to develop recommendations and programs around these two areas.’

**AU 2016**

‘I would like the opportunity to work with students more instructing them on information literacy and how to search the internet effectively.’

**NZ 2015**

‘I would like to work more collaboratively with teachers to teach information skills, by embedding the skills in the unit designs. I am working towards that.’

**AU 2015**

‘Federated search functions are very helpful for students in their research and need to be taught as part of Information Literacy programs. The Oliver Federated Search option is very good.’

**AU 2015**

# 64%

of kids aged 6-17 who read independently as a class or school say it's one of their favourite parts of the day or wish it would happen more often<sup>#</sup>

# 74%

of kids aged 6-17 say they would read more if they could find more books that they like<sup>#</sup>

## 3. Promoting engagement

School library professionals understand the importance of promoting student engagement with the library and the educational benefits of reading for pleasure.

In this section, respondents share ideas, feedback, and success stories about encouraging a love of reading and literature in their school libraries.

'We have had a dramatic increase in borrowing of physical fiction books in Middle School due to genrification of the collection and implementation of the DEAR programme.' [AU 2016](#)

'Social media will provide increasing opportunities for school libraries to raise their profile and engage users.' [UK 2015](#)

'Great IT resources are available for the younger students to use to make learning more interesting. Reading books for pleasure is still the best way to learn and increase your vocabulary.' [AU 2015](#)

'Accelerated Reader is having an impact on our year 7 students as it encourages them to read more and makes a huge difference to the weaker readers.' [UK 2015](#)

'There is a wealth of opportunities to harness that engage children in literature of all manner!' [AU 2016](#)

'We have a Library Loyalty Card which is working extremely well.

Girls get a stamp for each book they read. After 10 books they get a little reward.' [NZ 2016](#)

'I think that having exciting books on the shelves, inviting authors in to talk about their books and how they started makes the students much more aware and encourages more reading.' [UK 2015](#)

'Some younger students engage far better with reading if they are accessing resources on a digital device.' [UK 2015](#)

'When we opened our library last term we made a "shelfie" booth. Students had their photo taken with the first book they took out of the library - this became our first display.

It was a quick way to get their voice and presence into the space.' [NZ 2016](#)

'Over the past 2 years we have arranged authors to visit and provide workshops during Book Week for both Primary and Secondary classes. This has been a collaborative project with the English department.' [AU 2016](#)

'We use our Library for RWI (Read Write Ink) lessons and also for intervention groups called "Comic Clubs" which are for pupil premium children who need extra help with reading. We use comics to help the children engage in reading and have introduced other resources such as top trump cards.' [UK 2015](#)

'If students come into the library and leave it with a smile on their face, they will want to come back. It's exciting to have students tell their teacher, especially replacement teachers, that it is library lesson day and they can't miss it.' [AU 2016](#)

'I do think technology is constantly making the world a smaller, more exciting community. The way social media reaches students if combined correctly with author events and book competitions enables librarians to engage with the students in a vibrant way.' **UK 2015**

'I do reading advisories for reluctant readers on request from teachers or students that I think need it. They work really well.

I have also been enlarging the Graphic Novel collection for reluctant readers.' **NZ 2016**

'I am using Instagram as a way to connect with my students and publish new resources/events in the library.' **AU 2016**

'We have genrefied our fiction and non-fiction collections and the increase in borrowing and browsing books has been incredible.' **AU 2016**

'Allowing a student voice when it comes to the collection is also very important for their buy-in when it comes to choosing books to read. Reading for enjoyment and leisure is actively encouraged.' **NZ 2016**

'There has been a huge focus throughout our school on reading and student choice in reading materials. The role of the school library has been integral to this reading focus. There has been a positive effect on the students' views on reading for school as well as a leisure activity.' **AU 2015**

'Our school has just joined the Accelerated Reader Scheme and, whilst in its early stages, we are finding the students taking part are reading more and, on the whole, enjoying the quizzes.

We have also just started DEAR time 'Drop Everything and Read' on a Tuesday, again in its early stages, but we hope that the students will just get into the routine of reading and develop a love of reading. The number of students with a 'Kindle' or similar apps on their phones is increasing and film/book tie-ins remain popular.

Graphic books have taken off in the library, with a number of boys happily sitting with their heads in a graphic novel over break and lunchtimes.' **UK 2015**

## 4. Collaboration and literacy skills

Collaboration with teachers to support learning and align resources with curriculum is an important role for school library staff.

In this section, respondents share their collaboration examples and describe the many innovative ways they support curriculum, learning, and school-wide success.

'I am involved with lots of team teaching with different subject areas to improve student learning and engagement for various assessment tasks.' **AU 2016**

'I have implemented a catch up literacy programme to raise reading and spelling levels.' **UK 2015**

'One of my key roles is working closely with the Director of Literacy (English HOD) to develop Wide Reading lists, and Literature Circle programs.' **AU 2016**



# 91%

of library staff in Australia and New Zealand said that aligning curriculum with existing resources/practices is important or very important to their role^

# 77%

of library staff in the UK said that encouraging teaching staff to use the library and/or learning resources for lessons is most important or very important to their role\*

'The library works cooperatively with teachers in implementing reading programs and aligning library programs with the new English Syllabus.' [AU 2016](#)

'I have made my own week by week literacy skills programme for every year level (years 1 - 6).

It includes achievement objectives and learning intentions and follows a logical pattern for learning about the library and how to use it, how to search for books etc.' [NZ 2016](#)

'We have extensive wide reading programmes both in print and digital formats for all year levels from 6-12.' [AU 2016](#)

'Teachers bring classes for research across the curriculum (mainly Humanities) and I provide relevant resources.' [UK 2015](#)

'Collaboration is very important in our Library. Many of the decisions we make involve the whole school community, especially the students. This includes the term top 10, purchasing resources and how spaces are used in our Library.' [AU 2016](#)

'I would like to be included in more teachers' programs to help and to perform tutorials on how to research, use the databases and other resources.' [AU 2016](#)

'Accelerated Reader seems to be taking over in the UK. Now that the government is placing more emphasis on literacy, I think it will become practically universal. This is good news for school libraries.' [UK 2015](#)

'I'm using the Oliver library system to create resource lists that make it easier for students and staff to locate linked resources in both digital and non digital formats.

This supports teaching programs and aligns resources with the curriculum.' [AU 2016](#)

'I would like to be more involved in literacy reading classes.' [AU 2016](#)

'Working one on one with those who struggle with reading has been successful.' [NZ 2016](#)

'I would like to be more proactive in teaching research skills. Hopefully next year this will happen.' [AU 2015](#)

'The library works cooperatively with teachers in reading programs, aligning library programs with the new English Syllabus, organising publicity such as the family reading month, Book Week, Premier's Reading Challenge and class tailored programs such as 'Tell me a story'.' [AU 2016](#)

'We have a Literacy Team that meet regularly to discuss new ideas to implement across the college. We have the 'Word of the Week' which is displayed in the Library and in every classroom.

We also run various competitions throughout the year designed to improve literacy.' [UK 2015](#)

'We are currently very active in teaching study skills throughout the College, we address parents, and whole year groups and offer individual tuition with students referred by their teachers, parents or themselves.

We also do a one term programme with our year sevens where we teach them about the growth mindset and study techniques which is highly valued at the college.' [AU 2016](#)



# 95%

of library staff in the Australia and New Zealand said that provision of a learning centre and space is an important or very important service that the library provides<sup>^</sup>



## 5. Trends and opportunities

The contemporary school library is not just a book repository. It is a cultural hub, a social space, a centre for wellbeing, and a learning centre.

In this section, respondents describe the evolution of the modern school library into a vibrant and flexible space that promotes connectedness and sits at the centre of school life.

‘The trend that is the most exciting is that libraries are becoming social and interactive centres. They are hubs presenting workshops, meetings, children’s activities, etc.’

**AU 2016**

‘I see an increase in mobile learning and different formats for disseminating information. School libraries must adapt to become multimedia resource centres.’

**UK 2015**

‘NSW Government schools are all moving to Softlink’s Oliver system which will allow great collaboration. As a trial school, this has been a boon to our library for many years.’

**AU 2015**

‘Our school library is also the social hub of our school.’

**NZ 2016**

‘School librarians are one of the few people in a school who get to work with every child.’

The library is a place of sanctuary for some children and a social space for others.

My library is always busy, never quiet and usually full of boys, although recently this has evened out a little since we began the AR scheme. I would be seriously concerned if it wasn’t full at break and lunchtime. It’s a resource that every school should value and use for every subject.’

**UK 2015**

‘I feel the library has to change and become more of a centre for learning and creativity.’

**NZ 2015**

‘I think that there is case to be made for libraries to share online resources and independent schools may be in a position to do this.’

**UK 2015**

‘Things have changed so much and the whole concept of libraries has changed. This library has become a relaxed and comfortable place to work and a meeting place for students.’

**NZ 2015**

‘School libraries are centres for student well-being.’

**AU 2015**

‘We need to become a cultural hub/centre with Arts/Music displays and activities to bring people in and showcase student work.’

**AU 2015**

‘Modern libraries are not just places to read or use the computer but places for a wider range of teaching, learning and extra-curricular activities.’

**UK 2015**

‘Libraries can be such an important hub - the centre of knowledge within a school.’

**AU 2015**

# 76%

of library staff in Australia and New Zealand said that refurbishing/Updating the library or learning centre is important or very important to them<sup>^</sup>

## Sources

# 2015 Kids & Family Reading Report, Scholastic Australia, [http://www.scholastic.com.au/schools/ReadingLeaders/KFRR/assets/pdf/KFRR\\_AUS.pdf](http://www.scholastic.com.au/schools/ReadingLeaders/KFRR/assets/pdf/KFRR_AUS.pdf)

\*2016 Scholastic, School libraries work! - <http://www.scholastic.com/sl2016/>

<sup>^</sup>2016 Australian and New Zealand School Library Survey

\*2016 UK School Library Survey

'We are considering lunch time yoga - with a push to have the library provide resources that support the idea of a Wellness centre (mainly senior years) as the school starts a new push into student wellbeing.'

**AU 2016**

'My library is the centre of the school in terms of collaborative space, teaching support and recreational reading and discussion.

I think more and more this needs to be the 'waterhole' where ideas are exchanged and new inquiry learning ventures explored and planned.'

**AU 2015**

'Makerspaces are playing an increasingly important role in libraries.

Libraries need to be the community hub where people can come to see the new and exciting—to see the future.'

**NZ 2015**

'Utilising the library as a K-2 classroom is fantastic for the students who are surrounded by the wealth of resources - literally at their fingertips!'

**AU 2016**

'Our school, although small, uses the library for library lessons, Coding Club, O/T sessions, Extension Classes, lunch time sessions, borrowing/browsing before and after school, community yoga, Japanese challenges, and class research sessions.'

**AU 2016**

'I would like the library to be open for more hours and students be able to use this resource more flexibly during the day. I would like to be able to open the doors so students can spread out into the courtyard.'

**NZ**

'I aim to make my library the 'hub' of the school, literally a central resource where online and hard copy resources can be found and borrowed, issued and returned through Oliver, and where whole classes can be taken where library resources have been incorporated into schemes of work.'

**UK 2015**

'Technology is always changing and I feel it is important to be seen keeping up with it for schools.

The new makey spaces and learning structures are brilliant for students to embrace.'

**AU 2015**

'We currently have one space that includes a classroom, a meeting room, an open study area, a quiet reading area and a makerspace.

However, if I could add another storey I'd move the quiet study and reading upstairs and keep the downstairs as it is now...a central and lively hub for the school.'

**AU 2015**

'Closure of public libraries will open up new opportunities for modern Academies within the community.'

**UK 2015**

'Makerspaces are an example of the range of services a library can offer and the kind of place a school library can be - a place of investigation, excitement, discovery and entertainment.'

**NZ 2015**

'I am excited about the development of libraries as the 'heart' of the school with WIFI, BYOD and makerspaces included, so the library is a learning centre and comfortable space.'

**NZ 2015**

'We have implemented a pastoral reading program to support the mental health of our students.'

**AU 2016**

## Softlink and Oliver v5

Softlink has been providing school library software for over 30 years, offering solutions to meet the ongoing needs of schools globally. Users of **Oliver v5** benefit from regular new feature updates, which are developed in direct response to feedback and insights gained from our active user community.

## Contact us

Would you like to find out more about how Softlink and Oliver v5 can support your school library? Visit our website [softlinkint.com](http://softlinkint.com) or contact us via email [communications@softlinkint.com](mailto:communications@softlinkint.com).



## 6. Further reading and resources

Further reading and resources for your library can be found below.

**ALA, 2013, *100 things kids will miss if they don't have a school librarian in their school*** - [http://www.ala.org/aasl/sites/ala.org/aasl/files/content/aaslissues/advocacy/100\\_Things\\_Poster.pdf](http://www.ala.org/aasl/sites/ala.org/aasl/files/content/aaslissues/advocacy/100_Things_Poster.pdf)

**FAIR/ALIA 2016, *The impact of great school libraries*** - <https://fair.alia.org.au/sites/fair.alia.org.au/files/u3/Great%20Australian%20School%20Libraries%20Impact%20Report.pdf>

**Softlink's School Library Survey reports and whitepapers** - [softlinkint.com/resources/](http://softlinkint.com/resources/)

**National Literacy Trust, 2017, *School Libraries: A literature review of current provision and evidence of impact*** - [http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/assets/0004/1275/School\\_Libraries\\_2017\\_-\\_Final.pdf](http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/assets/0004/1275/School_Libraries_2017_-_Final.pdf)

**Leanne Edmiston, 2017, *Always a place for pen and paper in schools' as school libraries go digital*** - <http://www.couriermail.com.au/news/queensland/always-a-place-for-pen-and-paper-in-schools-as-school-libraries-go-digital/news-story/21612fe0e06d466da2b89e6d49cfec16>

**Great digital literacy skills ideas for your school library** - <https://www.softlinkint.com/blog/great-digital-literacy-skills-ideas-for-your-school-library/>

**Kay Oddone, 2016, *The importance of school libraries in the Google Age*** - [http://www2.curriculum.edu.au/scis/connections/issue\\_98/feature\\_article/importance\\_of\\_school\\_libraries\\_in\\_google\\_age.html](http://www2.curriculum.edu.au/scis/connections/issue_98/feature_article/importance_of_school_libraries_in_google_age.html)

**Softlink blog** - <https://www.softlinkint.com/blog/>

**Scholastic, 2016, *School libraries work!*** - <http://www.scholastic.com/slw2016/>

**School libraries share innovative ideas** - [https://www.softlinkint.com/downloads/School\\_Libraries\\_Share\\_Innovative\\_Ideas.pdf](https://www.softlinkint.com/downloads/School_Libraries_Share_Innovative_Ideas.pdf)

**Kay Oddone, 2017, *School libraries & Teacher Librarians: Linking to learning, literacy & levelling up*** - [http://www.linklearning.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/school\\_libraries.pdf](http://www.linklearning.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/school_libraries.pdf)