

# School Libraries: A plan for improvement



National  
Literacy  
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# School Libraries: A plan for improvement

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# Executive Summary

At a time when fewer than half of all 8 to 14-year-olds have read a book in the last month, it is critical that all the resources available to support pupil achievement are being targeted effectively and used efficiently. The research for this report has demonstrated the powerful role a high performing school library and schools library service plays in raising pupils' literacy levels and improving their access to knowledge.

Young people who read above the expected level for their age are twice as likely as young people who read below their age to be school library users (77.7% as opposed to 35.9%). This link is not necessarily causal but it does suggest that if school libraries do not perform to the highest level there will be significant implications for pupil achievement. Cuts to schools library services will exacerbate this problem.

What this Commission has established is that in many schools the school library is a wasted resource, poorly embedded in the infrastructure of the school: encouraging reading for pleasure but resistant to "teaching" literacy and phonics; absent from school development plans, official guidance and inspection frameworks; staffed (in one third of primary school libraries) by people who have no specialist knowledge of children's literature.

School library services could be a highly efficient way of ensuring that clusters of schools maximise their value for money by having access to the resources, information and expertise they need to develop children's reading and literacy, and offering access to knowledge. However outdated business and funding models mean their focus is often on how to make schools "buy back" rather than on rethinking provision in response to the challenge of raising literacy levels.

In order to develop this report the National Literacy Trust undertook a survey of 17,000 pupils; carried out a wide ranging programme of desk research; instituted a public consultation on the issues; carried out face to face interviews and focus groups with teachers and students.

As a result the report has a series of strong recommendations directed to governors, headteachers, sector bodies and local authorities which, if implemented, would improve literacy and attainment levels. All the recommendations aim to make school libraries more focused on supporting the educational objectives of the school by promoting literacy and access to knowledge.





# Chapter 1

## Introduction

Despite the fact that literacy levels remain the priority for the education sector fewer than half of 8 to 14-year-olds have read a book in the last month<sup>1</sup> and 31% of members of staff responsible for school libraries in primary schools have no specialist knowledge of children's literature<sup>2</sup>. The school library as the powerhouse of reading within the school seems to be failing to play a full and active part in raising literacy levels and creating an innate love of reading.

Access to information is increasingly ubiquitous. Technology promotes access to information for every purpose and in every setting. In this digital age information skills paired with literacy skills are vital. The renegotiation of the role of the state and the moves towards a Big Society will increase the significance of information skills, as it becomes more essential for people of all ages to be able to access and make sense of the information they need to help themselves. Information literacy defines levels of educational success and the ability to participate economically and socially in society. As the hub of information flows within the school, the school library needs to be a central player in making pupils information literate.

School libraries would seem to have an indisputable place in the work of the school, something recognised by staff and pupils. When asked if there was somewhere else that could perform the same role, one young person replied: *"There's nowhere"*. Something which sums up the majority of the responses.

However, evidence suggests that provision is patchy<sup>3</sup>: in the primary sector the concept of the school library as a vital element of teaching and learning is neither widespread nor embedded in school planning; in the secondary sector provision varies from the excellent to the invisible. Schools library services – local authority agencies to improve school library provision – are in sharp decline.

School libraries are an underutilised resource, often perceived by headteachers to be a low priority. What should be a vital ingredient of our schools system is marginalised and seems not to be connected with the acknowledged educational priorities of literacy and

information skills supporting knowledge acquisition, which are their core business.

The School Library Commission was jointly established by the The Museums, Libraries and Archives Council and the National Literacy Trust to examine why this is the case. Expert presentations were commissioned to review the evidence base for the impact on learning of school libraries and school library services as well as the current and future policy landscape and current levels of provision. The Commission published an open call for evidence (over 90 submissions were received – see appendix 1 for details of the responses) and consultation workshops and interviews were held with teachers, school librarians, headteachers, pupils, parents and academics. To support the Commission's work a survey was undertaken by the National Literacy Trust of 17,000 pupils to examine school library use and attitudes<sup>4</sup>.

The evidence established a solid need for a well-run school library and for the impact it could have when run well on pupils' literacy levels; enjoyment of reading; information literacy skills and access to knowledge; on their self esteem, confidence, sense of safety and wellbeing in the school community. As a result whilst this report demonstrates why schools should have a school library or access to a school library service it focuses more on how all these services could learn from the best and ensure that all young people have access to the support they need to develop and succeed.

This report contains the Commission's analysis of why school libraries fail to fulfil their potential in the education sector and what can be done to increase their contribution in the challenging times ahead. As headteachers and governors look to make savings the report looks at how the school library and the school library service might work in different ways and in new partnerships to deliver a more cost effective service.

The Commission believes that the resulting analysis and recommendations are robust and challenging. With Ted Hughes we recognise that:

*"Even the most misfitting child  
Who's chanced upon the library's worth,  
Sits with the genius of the Earth  
And turns the key to the whole world."*<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Clark and Douglas (forthcoming). *Young People's Reading and Writing: An in-depth study focusing on enjoyment, behaviour, attitudes and attainment*

<sup>2</sup> Rowan, T (2007), *Library Books in Schools: Spending and provision in primary and secondary schools in England*, p17

<sup>3</sup> Creaser, Maynard and White (2006) *LISU Annual Library Statistics 2006: Featuring trend analysis of public and academic libraries 1995 - 2005*

<sup>4</sup> Clark, C. (2010) *Linking School Libraries and Literacy: Young people's reading habits and attitudes to their school library*

<sup>5</sup> Hughes, T. (1997), *Hear it again*

# Chapter 2

## The Demand Side: What do those who use and fund the service want from it?

How children and young people perceive the school library, what they use it for and their views on the way in which it could be improved have all been critical to the Commission's debates and have played a significant role in informing its recommendations. Equally important have been the views of teachers, headteachers and school governors.

This evidence gathered from all these sources suggests recognition of the role the school library could and should be playing in the school but little real understanding amongst decision makers about how to use it to its best advantage or to develop it in the future. Amongst pupils the research has identified some surprising outcomes pointing to the need to involve young people more in the design and delivery of the service and to the need for a new skills base for librarians so they can better understand and meet pupils' needs.

### 2.1 Children and Young People

*"If it wasn't for the library, I wouldn't be reading at all."*

Any school-based activity must start by delivering effective learning outcomes for the child. Young people interviewed for this report talked in detail about what they did in the library and how it supported their learning and helped them to develop their skills. They strongly identified school libraries' outcomes as motivating them to love and enjoy reading and supporting them in their desire to build their knowledge base and to find information:

*"It's the best place to find great stories."*



This was substantiated by National Literacy Trust research undertaken for the Commission which established a very strong statistical relationship between reading attainment and school library use. Young people who read above the expected level for their age were twice as likely as young people who read below their age to be school library users (77.7% as opposed to 35.9%)<sup>6</sup>. Whilst the relationship is not necessarily causal, it does confirm that school libraries have a vital role to play in the reading patterns of those pupils who have higher literacy levels<sup>7</sup>.

Evidence submitted contained examples of excellent practice in planning libraries which responded to the needs of young people. They can be characterised as comfortable and welcoming environments, offering: more social reading opportunities (book clubs, peer recommendations, drama and games based on reading); excellent book stocks which stimulated the reading of young people; more access to up-to-date technology; more targeted services aimed at meeting the particular needs of particular groups<sup>8</sup>. By involving young people in the design, management and delivery of these services they feel an ownership of the school library and that it really did meet their needs.

For many young people reading is not necessarily associated just with reading books. Whilst 32% of those interviewed had read a book in the past fortnight, 64% had read a newspaper<sup>9</sup>. The research showed that children and young people have increasingly sophisticated information and literacy needs, developed through complex social, cultural and technological interactions. A third of young people use social networking, 84.5% own a computer and 86% have mobile phones<sup>10</sup>. Moreover, these needs are not uniform across the age group. Children and young people are as diverse as the communities which they

<sup>6</sup> Clark, C. (2010) *Linking School Libraries and Literacy: Young people's reading habits and attitudes to their school library*

<sup>7</sup> Ibid

<sup>8</sup> Appendix 1

<sup>9</sup> Full transcripts of focus groups can be found at [www.literacytrust.org.uk](http://www.literacytrust.org.uk)

<sup>10</sup> Clark & Hawkins (2010), *Young People's Reading: The importance of the home environment and family support*

come from and the families in which they are nurtured. Their consumption of media is related to their ethnic background, gender and social class<sup>11</sup>. Their experience of literacy is influenced by their socioeconomic backgrounds. Children on free school meals are less likely to own books and less likely to enjoy reading (47.7% compared to 51.2%)<sup>12</sup>. All of this suggests that librarians need to understand the ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds of the pupils in the school and to have developed services which can support their different reading cultures and needs.

In the consultation young people talked a lot about what they wanted from a school library and from a school librarian. Their comments present a less than conventional job description for a school librarian:

*“Someone who leaves you alone when you want to be left alone.”*

*“Good with kids...I know teachers who obviously don’t like kids at all.”*

*“If I choose a book, I can’t read it but I like the ones [the school librarian] tells me to read.”*

All of these comments reflect a belief that a school librarian should be someone who is trained to work with children and to understand their learning and emotional needs. At present the professional frameworks for librarians do not require them to develop knowledge of pedagogy, child development and child psychology. This is vital because understanding the differentiated needs of children is the key to designing services which can genuinely meet their needs. The role of the school library as a safe place for children figured prominently in the evidence. This theme is not well documented in the professional literature and not substantively researched: however, it was presented by a large number of professionals as a key theme of provision. It was also highlighted in the focus group of children and young people as one of the most important characteristics of the school library<sup>13</sup>.

A lot of the evidence from children and young people focused on the library as a “safe place”, a place where library staff would send “big gangs of Year 11 lads” out of the library if they were too rowdy. “If I didn’t feel safe, I wouldn’t come.” “If you didn’t have friendly staff, you wouldn’t feel safe.”<sup>14</sup>

The evidence received by the Commission suggests that the school library has a significant role to play for children who for a variety of needs find the school environment particularly unwelcoming. As a space which is regulated by adults at times of the school day when spaces are largely peer regulated this is understandable. Given that in 2007 the UK came bottom in a UNICEF league table of child happiness<sup>15</sup>, this is a significant finding. However, if the school library is to take this role on responsibly then there needs to be consideration of how it is integrated into whole school policies and library staff are supported with appropriate training. It is clearly inappropriate for the library to be a default sanctuary.

The Commission recommends that the planning, management and delivery of school libraries needs to be a response to the learning needs of the pupils in the school community and needs to understand that different learners within the same community will require different types of support in accessing knowledge and information.

- School librarians must be given access to, and must interpret the rich data that teachers have on pupil background and performance in the school community.
- School librarians should be fully aware of the community and home reading cultures of pupils in their school.
- School libraries must develop tools to respond to different needs of different groups of pupils – this might include opening the school library at specific times for different types of library use (quiet study, reading groups, group learning etc.), promotions and resources which are aimed at specific groups of pupils (ethnic press and musical interest, use of sports and other popular cultural links).
- English as an additional language materials provision and alternative format provision for children with special education needs must be integrated in library planning.

<sup>11</sup> Clark and Douglas (forthcoming) *Young People’s Reading and Writing: An in-depth study focusing on enjoyment, behaviour, attitudes and attainment*

<sup>12</sup> Ibid

<sup>13</sup> Appendix 1

<sup>14</sup> Full transcripts of focus groups can be found at [www.literacytrust.org.uk](http://www.literacytrust.org.uk)

<sup>15</sup> Unicef (2007), *Child poverty in perspective: An overview of child well-being in rich countries*, p36

- Common templates for translating the community data into relevant school library provision should be developed at a national level and school librarians should be encouraged to use them annually to respond to change.

## 2.2 Teachers, Headteachers and Governors

*We are currently developing a Transition Curriculum for Year 7 pupils. The aim of the curriculum is to aid the transition process and deliver Personal Learning and Thinking Skills to Year 7 pupils. The role of the librarian and the library in the London project was crucial to its success... Pupils worked on and improved upon a variety of skills including research skills and literacy skills (skimming and scanning), transforming information (e.g. turning facts into questions). Pupils enjoyed working on the project and saw a real purpose to their work.<sup>16</sup>*

City of London Academy



The research showed that while some headteachers and governing bodies saw the school library as an essential element of their school development plan many others had given little thought to the part it could be playing in the life of the school<sup>17</sup>. In the consultation groups, headteachers who did not currently regard the library as a priority did not do so out of hostility but simply because they had not thought of it as a strategically useful resource<sup>18</sup>. This is in part as a result of the absence of the school library in official guidance and inspection frameworks and is linked to the low pay and status of school librarians.

Those headteachers and governing bodies who did recognise the value and contribution the school library and school library service could make offered clear pointers as to how the service should be positioning itself in the future. Across the primary and secondary sectors they pointed to the need for:

- Advocacy to school leaders through leadership networks and groups to make them aware of the role of the school library and to promote knowledge of successful models of good practice and the way in which the specific contribution of the school library can help the school reach its targets. Awareness of the potential of school libraries is a significant issue. School library services have a crucial role to play in undertaking this advocacy.
- Members of staff running school libraries to proactively provide information about levels and types of use to senior management in their own school and also in partner schools (feeders, schools in clusters and collaboratives), the contribution they make to literacy and knowledge management and the way in which they can support both formal and informal learning.
- The school library to play a part in the wider role of the school helping it to deliver its after-hours provision and to work with the families and the wider community to support literacy and enjoyment of reading.
- School librarians to be positioning themselves as part of the teaching staff in the school – working with senior management and heads of department to identify how they can collectively support learning and reviewing their contribution against the goals and targets of the whole school.

<sup>16</sup> Appendix 2a

<sup>17</sup> Appendix 1

<sup>18</sup> Full transcripts of focus groups can be found at [www.literacytrust.org.uk](http://www.literacytrust.org.uk)



# Chapter 3

## The Supply Side: How school libraries are delivered and operate

If the school library has a powerful role to play in pupil development and attainment then the number and quality of school libraries and the way in which they are supported by school library services, professional bodies and agencies committed to school improvement is clearly critical.

However, no systematic quantitative evidence of the current levels of provision of school libraries currently exists. In assessing supply the Commission has had to rely on partial statistical evidence and reports from agencies that support school libraries – these include professional bodies as well as agencies committed to school improvement.

### 3.1 Primary School Libraries

Primary school library provision is determined by the shape of the primary school sector: a large number of small schools with high levels of autonomy and relatively small budgets means that provision varies massively and even in those schools for which the school library is a priority the employment of a qualified librarian is frequently not financially viable.

According to CILIP's 2010 research<sup>19</sup> 81% of primary schools have a designated library space (down from 88% in Booktrust's 2007 survey<sup>20</sup>); 30% of which are

supervised by a school librarian most of whom are not professionally qualified as librarians; 27% are supervised by a teacher; 9% by volunteers and 14% are supervised by nobody.

In the 2007 survey it was established that 31% of persons in charge of primary school libraries had no specialist knowledge of children's literature.

The evidence received from one county library service described a typical range of primary school library provision.

*We acknowledge that whilst many primary schools boast impressive and well stocked school libraries, there are still those that are poorly located, badly organised and inappropriately stocked with old, out of date material, much of which is in poor condition. In some schools the library is divided between individual classes and there seems to be no real system in place to encourage effective, purposive borrowing. Unless a Literacy Co-ordinator or interested parent/carer is given specific responsibility for organising and managing the library, many school libraries become just random collections of books which offer no attraction to children and remain largely under-used. Few teachers have been adequately trained in library organisation or stock promotion.*

In this scenario the skills of staff from schools library services could have a particularly valuable role to play in supporting and improving primary school library provision.

### 3.2 Secondary School Libraries

Secondary school library provision also varies massively, although larger budgets, more space and a stronger professional tradition means that good provision is more established and less reliant on partnerships with other schools and the schools library service.

Booktrust's 2007 research showed that almost all secondary schools have a dedicated school library space. However, the quality varies enormously: CILIP's research demonstrates that 58.7% are run by a professionally qualified librarian (this does not indicate educational expertise) and 34.8% by an "other" designated school librarian<sup>21</sup>.



<sup>19</sup> CILIP (2010), *School libraries in the UK A worthwhile past, a difficult present and a transformed future? Report of the UK National Survey*, p18

<sup>20</sup> Booktrust (2007) *Library Books in Schools*, p4

<sup>21</sup> CILIP (2010), *School libraries in the UK A worthwhile past, a difficult present and a transformed future? Report of the UK National Survey*, p4

78 % of respondents to the Booktrust 2007 who managed secondary school libraries had specialist knowledge of children's literature (22% did not).

Although school libraries are more likely to be found in secondary schools<sup>22</sup>, even where there is investment it is possible that the school library is not fulfilling its potential role as a result of the failure to integrate its activities within the schools plans for teaching and learning.



### 3.3 Schools Library Services

The last comprehensive study of schools library services was in 2005 when 65% of children were supported by a schools library service - 73% of primaries and 54% of secondaries subscribed to their schools library service<sup>23</sup>. This followed a decade of decline. In 1996 85% of children in schools were supported by a schools library service<sup>24</sup>.

Schools library services could be a cost effective way of ensuring that all schools, but particularly primary schools, have access to the expertise and resources they may not have on site or may not be able to afford in the future. However, the delegation of school library service funds to schools has focused their business model on the drive for buy back. As a result they do

not have the time or opportunity to step back and develop new models of delivery. That many are being cut or slated for closure suggests that new delivery and business models need to be identified which have a clear strategic direction and identity. Schools library services need to be positioned to deliver improved outcomes around reading, literacy and information in a cost effective and efficient way.

There are some significant examples of successful services which have made this transition and which have instigated or developed collaborative approaches to improving provision. In these models clusters of primary schools have worked in partnership with a schools library service.

*Five years ago Tower Hamlets schools library service developed a new service which offers schools a qualified librarian to look after the library for a half day or a day a week. Often, after the Tower Hamlets service had helped schools set up and classify their libraries, staff changes meant that the libraries were not being maintained. To combat this problem, the group of primary schools have a qualified librarian visit every week and work in their library to ensure that it is well maintained. The qualified librarian also helps the schools to make best use, not just of the schools own resources, but also of the resources Tower Hamlets Schools Library Service provides<sup>25</sup>.*

In the future school library services will need to look at new governance arrangements which would allow them to operate in different and more flexible ways, diversifying their business and operating across local boundaries. These might include working as social enterprise arms of commercial companies and working with public libraries and other agencies to provide different types of reading support.

As the Department for Education reviews how schools work with local agencies supporting school improvement, they need to positively acknowledge the potential contribution of schools library services. The expansion of the academies programme, the creation of free schools and the end of the National Strategies means that this market will become increasingly complex. In response schools library services need to creatively respond to the commissioning environment and develop services that meet local needs.

<sup>22</sup> Booktrust (2007), *Library Books in Schools*

<sup>23</sup> Creaser, C. & Maynard, S (2005), *A Survey of Library Services to School and Children in the UK 2004-2005*, pp209,210, 221-2

<sup>24</sup> Ibid

<sup>25</sup> Appendix 2b

### 3.4 Supporting agencies

At this moment there are significant uncertainties about how public and voluntary sector agencies supporting school improvement will relate to schools. With the ending of the Government-sponsored National Strategies and moves to increase the autonomy of schools, it is likely that peer groups, collaboratives and clusters will commission independent consultants and agencies to work with them to deliver locally identified school improvement targets. Local authority services will fit within this market. This will potentially redefine the role of school library services. It also offers an opportunity for public libraries, professional groups and third sector agencies to take on a more significant role.

There are a plethora of groups and organisations offering support to school libraries. The Museums, Libraries and Archives Council is currently the lead body for libraries. School libraries have both a national professional body (the Chartered Institute for Library and Information Professionals – with its own school library special interest group) as well as a national network group (the School Library Association). The Association of Senior Children’s and Education Librarians is the focus for national leadership. The National Literacy Trust’s Reading Connects network<sup>26</sup> of over 5,000 schools provides a focus for much school library activity. Booktrust has undertaken research and support for school libraries. In addition the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust has taken an increasing interest in the improvement of school libraries during the last 5 years<sup>27</sup>.

Despite such a plenitude of networks, there are few national statutory levers for school library development. They have not formed a significant part of the national school strategies. Neither does the regulatory system deem them obligatory. Recent campaigns have drawn attention to the fact the provision of school libraries is discretionary. Despite Ofsted’s publication of a school library self evaluation framework<sup>28</sup>, and a review of provision, schools which gain an excellent assessment in Ofsted inspection can do so without a school library, because Ofsted rightly focuses on outcomes rather than inputs.

In the current context the promotion of partnerships focused on school library improvement, pupil entitlements and the outcomes of school library

provision are a potentially stronger mechanism than the promotion of professionally endorsed standards which are input focused.

One of the key agencies which school libraries and school library services could and should be working more closely with is the public library. All pupils should be encouraged to have a library card and be introduced to and encouraged to use their public library. The resources of the public library and the different skills sets of the staff who work there should be being harnessed to broaden and enhance the reading and information offer of the school. Partnership with the public library service allows the school library to demonstrate the role it plays as a vital resource for the whole community.



<sup>26</sup> [http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/reading\\_connects](http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/reading_connects)

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.ssatrust.org.uk/Pages/home.aspx>

<sup>28</sup> Ofsted (2006), *Good School Libraries: Making a difference to learning*

# Chapter 4

## Improvement: The principles of good school library provision

The Commission was presented with a wealth of evidence which demonstrated excellent practice in delivering library services in schools. Some of this had not been publicised or shared, highlighting the fact that leading practice is not well documented.

The research examined by the Commission suggests that at the heart of all successful provisions are a set of core principles. These need to be the basis for all models of successful school library provision. This chapter explains what these principles are and the evidence from research and best practice which underpins them.

The body of research which the Commission examined tended to identify the same three factors as determining the effectiveness of school library provision. These were highlighted by the 2000 DfES sponsored research into effective school library provision undertaken by Robert Gordon University<sup>29</sup>:

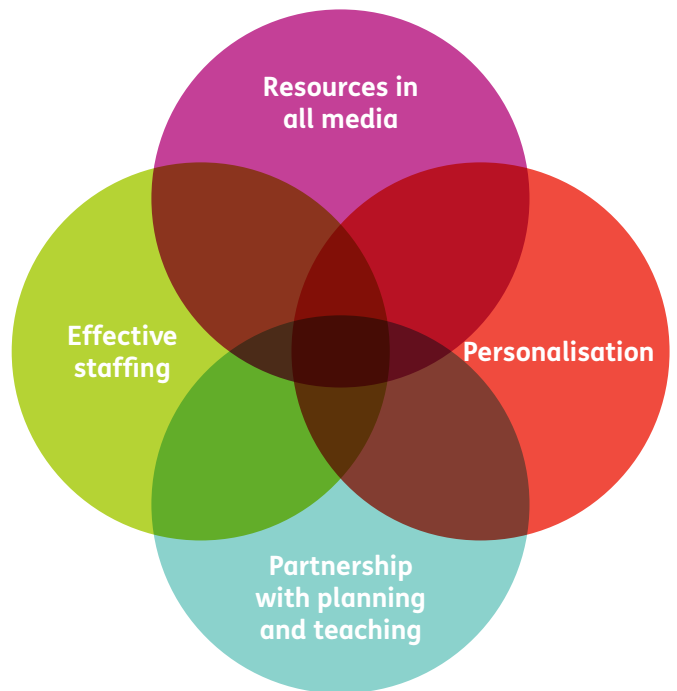


Definitions of what quality inputs in all these areas look like were readily identified by many submissions of evidence. These reflected well established professional guidance.

However, a fourth factor would also seem to come into play in determining the effectiveness of the school library in an ever increasingly diverse school community. Personalised school libraries, that is services that are built on the analysis of and engagement with the diverse needs of the school community, are fundamentally better equipped to fulfil their learning and teaching role. Both in the evidence supplied and in the research undertaken there was strong evidence that one size of school library will not fit all learners and that the design of the service needs to consciously engage with the differentiated needs of different pupils.

On this basis the Commission believes that there are four factors which determine effective provision. These are the basic principles which need to be addressed in primary and secondary provision and which schools library services and partner agencies need to focus on.

The Commission received powerful evidence of the importance of all four.



<sup>29</sup> Williams, Wavel and Coles (2001), *Impact of School Library Services on Achievement and Learning*



## 4.1 Resources in all media

The most attractive element of provision for pupils is reading materials (56.4% say it is why they use the library, compared to 37% who use it for the computers<sup>30</sup>). The evidence demonstrated how school libraries are now integrating new technologies into their collections, managing collections that were deep and varied and that could work together to support learning. At the same time the evidence from headteachers suggests that most do not consider the school library to have a strategic role in the school's ICT development and use. As such they are failing to get the best possible value from a key resource that they have in the school.

The need to tailor resources in the library to different audiences came through as a strong finding of the National Literacy Trust's research for the Commission. Their need for differentiated resources was a particularly significant trend. Young people's media consumption patterns and forms of accessing information as well as their behaviours and attitudes to reading are influenced by their age, gender, socioeconomic backgrounds and ethnicity<sup>31</sup>. This research confirmed that there were significant differences, particularly related to ethnicity in their attitudes to school libraries. For instance Asian pupils put a far higher value on the book stock.

**43.1% of Asian pupils who did not use the library did so because they did not rate the book stock, as opposed to 24.4% of Black pupils and 33.6% of White pupils who did not use the library<sup>32</sup>.**

## 4.2 Effective staffing

By far the strongest bank of evidence received by the Commission concerned the importance of the school librarian. In part this might reflect the fact that much of the evidence came from professionals eager to document their value. There were powerful

professional statements which bear witness to the strong vocational sense of many librarians. The significance of the staffing in school libraries in delivering outcomes echoes the findings of OFSTED research in 2004<sup>33</sup>. In a survey of 32 primary and secondary school libraries inspectors observed that the best school librarians had a positive impact both on teaching and on students' learning.

***“The impact of a knowledgeable and well qualified librarian on all aspects of the service, including the quality of the stock, should not be underestimated.”***

Although they understood their centrality to the effectiveness of the school library, a common theme in most of the professional evidence from school librarians was a sense of frustration and professional isolation. This was linked to environmental, management and operational factors. But it may also be the consequence of the distance which some librarians feel that their service needs to maintain from the classroom and from pedagogy.

The issue of the professional identity of the school librarian was discussed by the Commission. A common theme in educational research over the past decade has been the correlation of the levels of professional qualification of the school workforce with pupil levels of attainment<sup>34</sup>. The Commission believes that the skills of the school librarian are crucial to unlocking the potential of the school library.

School librarians have traditionally been trained through a librarianship route: a degree or postgraduate qualification in information management, followed by two years of professional practice before receiving



<sup>30</sup> Clark, C. (2010) *Linking School Libraries and Literacy: Young people's reading habits and attitudes to their school library*

<sup>31</sup> Clark & Hawkins (2010), *Young People's Reading: The importance of the home environment and family support*

<sup>32</sup> Clark, C. (2010) *Linking School Libraries and Literacy: Young people's reading habits and attitudes to their school library*

<sup>33</sup> Ofsted (2006), *Good school libraries: making a difference to learning*, p13

<sup>34</sup> McKinsey (2007), *How the World's Best-performing Schools Come Out on Top*, p5

their professional charter. However we are concerned that the current professional training and formation for school librarians is not adequate. As well as the vital skills of information management and stock management they need a deep understanding of learning, pedagogy and child development. However, the generic qualification framework for librarianship is not sufficient to run an effective school library

Without this training they will be inhibited in their ability to work within the curriculum, limited in their input into curriculum planning and it will weaken the strategic position of the school library, making it harder for it to occupy that space at the heart of the school.

Anyone in charge of a school library requires at least a basic understanding of library management and children's reading, alongside a familiarity with teaching and support for learning and an awareness of child development.

The Commission recommends that:

- A module in library management and children's reading should be available for all those teachers and teaching assistants who currently manage a school library.
- All school librarians who are professionally trained in librarianship should undertake a module in teaching, learning and child development. Such training is widely available.
- All providers of initial teacher training should make available modules or placement opportunities in school libraries. Where possible these should be offered in association with Higher Education Institutions who are offering courses in librarianship and information management.
- Higher Education Institutions providing courses in librarianship and information management should offer a module in learning and teaching and child development.

School librarians should be expected to have been trained through one of these routes. In addition they need to be part of any Inset training which staff receive within the school to help them work with pupils.

The school library needs to be managed by a member of staff who has a strong knowledge of children,



their reading and their learning. The librarian must be confident both in terms of the role of the library in supporting delivery of the curriculum, raising levels of literacy and supporting information skills. Current professional pathways do not necessarily create members of the school's workforce who are equipped to deliver the unique pedagogy which is the characteristic of the school library.

### 4.3 Partnership with planning and teaching in school and organisations outside it

Many school librarians feel that the effectiveness of their service is limited by management factors in the school. There is a sense that many school librarians are denied the status they need to develop the library as a strategic school resource. This is undeniably the case. It is also apparent that the discrete professional identity of some school librarians and the distance that some school libraries create between themselves and classroom practice exacerbates management factors. School librarians need to be re-positioning themselves as part of the teaching staff in the school – working with senior management and heads of department to identify how they can collectively support learning and to influence teaching and learning. Headteachers also need to build the school library into the whole school plan and into workforce development plans – understanding the value of the contribution it can make, challenging it to do more and reviewing its

contribution against the goals and targets of the whole school.

The evidence presented and research prepared for the Commission showed that:

- School librarians are comfortable with concepts of “reading for pleasure” but not so comfortable with literacy and phonics making them less relevant to the school’s literacy agenda.
- Many school librarians do not feel comfortable taking on a teaching role<sup>35</sup> and many have no teacher training, causing an ambivalence in terms of their role in delivering the curriculum.
- Many school libraries are conceived and managed as a “third space” – neither home nor school.
- School libraries, with some notable exceptions, are not at the cutting edge of literacy practice or information provision and knowledge management, therefore their contribution to these priorities is underestimated.

A 21<sup>st</sup> century vision for any school activity must start with delivering effective learning outcomes. For a school library and a school library service the core outcomes are: supporting literacy; motivating children to love and enjoy reading; teaching children to access and use information and turn it into knowledge. The evidence which the School Library Commission collected showed how important the service could be in delivering these outcomes.

These skills are fundamental in enabling young people to choose the best life pathways and yet the evidence showed that school librarians and school library services were frequently poor at identifying the learning outcomes they were delivering and at presenting their role in the learning process to senior staff and to school governors.

School Library Services as well as school librarians also seem to be, on occasion, ambivalent about their role in delivering educational outcomes. Many services in their evidence found it hard to identify their outcomes; others talked only about cultural themes, neglecting the equally important educational ones. This is a strategic challenge for anyone trying to deliver a library service in or to a school; the service will only thrive if it is embedded in the school’s own improvement plans and if the people running the service understand the

way in which reading and literacy is being taught in the school and know how to support it.

These attitudes in School Library Services are compounded by the ambivalent position of some schools library services within local services: whilst many schools library services are administered by the public library service, staffed by people who are mainly library-trained, their clients are schools (and sometimes early years settings and colleges) to which their funding is delegated.

At a national level there is confusion whether their strategic lead rests with the Department for Education or the Department for Culture, Media and Sport.

Where schools library services have a strong alignment with local education priorities they can realise their potential role in supporting school improvement. One schools library service explained to the Commission:

*“It is clear to us that the success of our school library service is largely due to the fact that it is based and managed within the Education Department. The service is located in the Service Improvement Team and is managed by one of the senior inspectors. The requirements on the service and on the staff are emphatically to be part of the process of supporting schools and helping them with their developments<sup>36</sup>.”*

Where public library services are closely linked or deemed to underpin corporate agendas such as health and learning, school library services can also play a fundamental role not just in supporting the school but also in assisting public libraries support young people outside school with the best library provision.

Previous reports (Empowering the Learning Community<sup>37</sup>, Investing in Children ) have looked at the three types of library services for children<sup>38</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Williams, Wavel and Coles (2001), *Impact of School Library Services on Achievement and Learning*

<sup>36</sup> Full transcripts of focus groups can be found at [www.literacytrust.org.uk](http://www.literacytrust.org.uk)

<sup>37</sup> Library Information Commission (2000), *Empowering the Learning Community*

<sup>38</sup> Ellzin and Denham (1995), *Investing in Children: A real strategy for future development?*



and young people (public libraries, schools library services and school libraries) and have advocated their integration with each other to improve delivery. In the current environment partnerships need to be built on outcomes not on the format of services. The Commissioning of local services requires both public and school library services to work on integrated delivery with other providers to children and young people. The school library's primary identity needs to be that of school not of library.

*In Coventry the Schools Library Service is part of Education and Learning and has been commissioned to undertake a benchmarking survey of all primary school libraries and a citywide review of library facilities to support Post 16 Education as part of an Ofsted Action Plan following an Area wide inspection of the local authority. In both cases these reviews led to significant improvements in school library provision.<sup>39</sup>*

#### Coventry Schools Libraries Service

School libraries and school library services need to be whole hearted in their role in supporting and influencing teaching and learning. They need to understand their own pedagogy and the pedagogy of the classroom and how the two interact. Operating as they are in an educational context they need to be clear about their support for the vision the school's leadership has for the school and demonstrate the contribution they can make to deliver that vision. Stronger alignment of school libraries with their educational purpose needs to be the fundamental theme underpinning school library improvement activity.

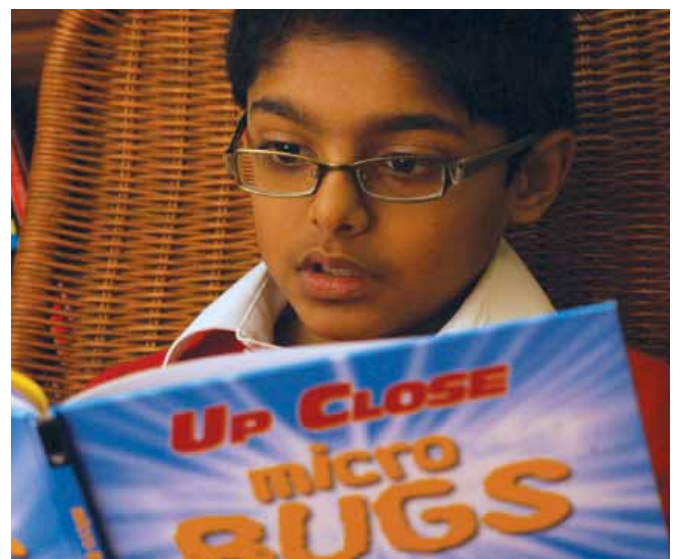
## 4.4 Personalisation

One of the issues which became clear from the consultation was that the need to focus more on learning outcomes had also to be accompanied by a better understanding of how children and young people learn. The consultation responses tended to focus on the "universal" nature of what the school libraries offer – the library as a safe space with resources available which children could use in a variety of ways to meet their needs. But this approach fails to recognise the very differentiated needs of children and young people.

There were some excellent examples offered in the evidence of where a school library had addressed the needs of a particular group of pupils and developed a service based on their needs:

*Our school library has been fundamental to developing the way we work with boys. We recognised many years ago that boys who arrived at secondary school with literacy needs felt alienated and found it difficult to access lessons. Research showed us the need to put into place a programme to raise literacy levels and provide a framework of behaviour interventions. The library spearheaded a reading trail structure for English lessons. We empowered the staff to take a lead, provided the resources and the library went from strength to strength.<sup>40</sup>*

Forest Hill School, Lewisham



<sup>39</sup> Appendix 2c

<sup>40</sup> Appendix 2d



# Chapter 5

## New Delivery Mechanisms

The Commission is mindful that it is making its recommendations at a unique moment. The election of the Coalition Government in May 2010 means that many of the mechanisms for improving schools will change and all will be operating within a climate of straitened resources. However, the Commission believes that the necessity for change in school libraries and schools library services if recognised and driven by the sector itself, could have a significant impact on teaching, learning and national standards of literacy.

Schools, like all organisations, need to look at ways of saving money and getting better value for money. School libraries and school library services are, as this report has shown, very vulnerable because they are in many schools and Local Authorities perceived as an added value activity rather than an essential one and as not fundamental to delivering the learning goals of the school. As everyone seeks to find new ways of delivering high quality services school libraries need to be taking pro-active steps to identify new partnerships and new approaches.

Many of the most effective examples of excellent school library provision identified as a result of this research were the results of partnerships. Most frequently these were with – or were facilitated by – schools library services. However, frequently they were also with other schools or local or national businesses or third sector agencies.

Partnerships to improve and deliver school libraries are particularly important for schools where resources were scarce. At a time when the public sector is facing tighter economic management the potential of schools working in partnership to purchase and deliver improved provision will become increasingly important.

As the top-down mechanisms for school improvement are removed, partnerships will inevitably provide a vital mechanism in sharing best practice between schools and supporting improvement. Schools will be encouraged to develop partnerships with other schools, schools library services, businesses, charities and public libraries as the primary mechanism of improving their provision.

There are already bodies in place which can support this process and which could help to broker the types of relationships needed. Some partnerships will be about purchasing and commissioning, some about sharing resources and some about learning. However we believe that access to these partnerships and contacts is crucial if schools are to be given a framework for exploring how their school library provision can be improved.



The Commission hopes a network of school library partnerships will provide a national dynamic framework for improving all four elements of good school library provision.

The partnerships suggested for schools may include working with the following agencies, all of whom were cited as partners in the evidence presented to the Commission:

- **Schools library services.**
- **Public libraries: joint working and co-located provision.** The issue of improving the links between public and school libraries and of the co-location of school and public and/or college libraries has been a recurring theme over the past thirty years. Many partnerships have faltered because of partnership management issues, but for both strategic and economic reasons the model makes good sense and should be taken seriously, particularly for the contribution it can make to the development of extended services.

- **Primary schools working with secondary schools: Cross phase libraries.** In many authorities the relationship between secondary schools and their feeder primaries is significant not just in terms of supporting transition but as a strategic framework for the local learning community. Pyramid provision of school libraries – with either a shared common space or with a shared library team – would strengthen the partnership.
- **Primary schools working together: Primary cluster collaborative libraries.** Some authorities (such as Tower Hamlets) already have shared primary school library provision. As collaboratives, federations and clusters become more common this model needs further promotion particularly through a more systematic evaluation of the efficiencies it achieves.

Despite the effectiveness of partnerships, it is clear from the research that access to some kind of national support is often vital if change and development is to happen. For the librarian working alone or for the school library service struggling to deliver the service, trying to reconfigure the service or to develop and improve it is challenging. They need help to develop new business models; to broker partnerships; to access best practice and to grow their skills and network with others. Professional support bodies like the School Library Association already provide some of this support and could position themselves to offer more in the future.

# Chapter 6

## Summary of Recommendations

### 6.1 The Department for Education

Most of the recommendations in this report are aimed at the headteachers, governors, school librarians and the agencies responsible for supporting change and improvement in the sector.

However, all would be supported in their work if, at a national level, The Department for Education were to wholeheartedly endorse the role of school libraries and schools library services in supporting the new government's renewed commitment to literacy.

In the education strategies of the past decade, apart from guidance papers for the Key Stage 3/ Secondary Strategy<sup>41</sup>, school libraries were invisible. This meant that they were perceived as being relatively insignificant to national educational priorities and a major lever to their improvement was lost. In future, major education initiatives need to consider the potential role of school libraries.

As the Department for Education reviews how schools work with local agencies supporting school improvement, they need to positively acknowledge the potential contribution of schools library services. The expansion of the academies programme, the creation of free schools and the end of the National Strategies means that this market will become increasingly complex. In response schools library services need to creatively respond to the commissioning environment and develop services that meet local needs.

### 6.2 Headteachers and School Governors

- Recognise the contribution that the school library and the schools library service make to inspiring children's reading, supporting their literacy and developing their information skills.
- Build the school library into the planning and delivery of the curriculum and review its contribution to the whole school delivery plan.
- Consider the school library as a tool in the School Improvement Plan and include it in the Self Evaluation Framework (SEF).
- Recognise the role the school library can play in the safeguarding agenda and ensure that staff are trained to deliver this and that the role of the library is built into the anti-bullying strategy.
- Challenge and champion the service and act as an advocate for it with colleagues.
- Review how the service is delivered to see if there are new partnerships which can be developed and/or more cost effective ways of delivering the service.
- Examine whether school library provision is a theme for development through primary clusters.

<sup>41</sup> <http://nationalstrategies.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/search/secondary/results/nav:46515>

- Ensure the library is an active player in providing extended services and support for families as well as fulfilling the school's community cohesion duty.
- Review the Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programme for school librarians and ensure that they receive the training which will support them in forging better delivery partnerships across the school.
- Ensure that pupils have access to staff who have the expert knowledge of children's literature which can help build a love of reading and knowledge of how to develop pupils' information literacy skills.
- Give libraries a strategic role in the school's ICT development and use.
- Every governing body should have a governor with designated responsibility for the school library. It may be appropriate to combine this role with the governor who takes a lead on literacy issues.

### 6.3 School Librarians

- Understand and influence the vision the school's leadership has for the school, be up to date with school policies and actively contribute to the School Improvement Plan and SEF.
- Work pro-actively in partnership with teachers through curriculum planning to align the school library with their educational purpose and involve themselves in delivery.
- Create new partnerships in the wider community with feeder/partner school libraries, public libraries, booksellers, community and voluntary groups.
- Involve pupils in library design, management and delivery.
- Understand the reading cultures of the pupils and ensure that the service can meet and support their differentiated needs.
- Keep up to date with how pupils use new media and support this in the library.
- Review their own CPD to develop their understanding of pedagogy and their role in child safety.

- Develop the evidence base about the use and impact of the service using tools such as Inspiring Learning for All<sup>42</sup>.



### 6.4 Professional and Support Bodies

- Develop a module in library management and children's reading for all those teachers and teaching assistants who currently manage a school library.
- Ensure that all school librarians who are professionally trained in librarianship can undertake training in teaching, learning and child development.
- Encourage providers of initial teacher training to make available school library modules or placement opportunities in school libraries.
- Ensure that Higher Education Institutions providing courses in librarianship and information management should offer access to an accredited module in learning and teaching and child development.
- Collect and disseminate best practice in the delivery of school libraries and the school library services.
- Develop the evidence base around impact and outcomes.
- Create a virtual national network for school library governors.

<sup>42</sup> <http://www.inspiringlearningforall.gov.uk>

- Schools library services should have links to local authority governor support units and ensure an annual training opportunity relating to school libraries.

## 6.5 Local Authorities

The evidence received by the Commission demonstrated that schools library services can fulfil a vital role in raising the standard of provision of school libraries within a local authority. Due to strategic neglect and funding arrangements many services are on the brink of disappearing. The Commission believes that if the service does disappear another agency would have to be invented which would support schools in raising the standard of their school libraries.

The Commission believes that local authorities need to:

- Recognise school library services as a cost effective way of providing expertise and skills around reading and information literacy to schools.
- Use them as local agencies of school improvement with a particular focus on improving literacy standards.
- Encourage them to forge strong partnerships.
- Support the service in looking at new business models which could enable them to diversify their services; provide better value for money and survive and thrive.

## 6.6 Campaigners, Champions and Authors

The role of advocacy in supporting school library development has been increasingly understood over the past few years. The Commission feels that effective campaigning in the future needs to argue for changes in the model of school libraries as well as for increased demand for their services from school and education leaders. Moreover, the networks of those committed to championing the service need to be broadened. A strategic advocacy partnership with the National College should be formed and a network of school governors supportive of school libraries created. These should provide the focus for future advocacy activity.

<sup>43</sup> Hughes, T. (1997), *Hear It Again*.

# Conclusion

## Reading the Future

In its call for evidence the Commission asked the question “*is there any other service or partnership which can deliver the outcomes of a school library?*” In neither the evidence supplied nor the research examined could the Commissioners find any evidence that the school libraries role could be delivered in another way.

An effective school library acting as a powerhouse of learning and reading within a school is a unique resource.

Our vision of a renewed school library system in the nation’s schools is fundamentally about realising the potential of every child by exciting the latent reader and learner in all.

The child’s experience of the school and of learning will impact decisively on his future, and for many children the library is a vital part of this experience, although for each the experience will differ, for every child is unique:

*For this one’s dreams and that one’s acts  
For all who’ve failed or aged beyond  
The reach of teachers, here are found  
The inspiration and the facts.*

*Hear it again!*<sup>43</sup>





# Appendix 1

## Summary of Evidence Gathered

During consultation for the School Library Commission evidence was gathered in the following ways:

- An open call for evidence, with over 90 submissions received.
- Focus group with pupils aged 11-16, Buxton Community School.
- Three focus groups with school staff, including teachers, school librarians and headteachers.
- Virtual focus group with local authority staff and other stakeholders.

Below is a summary of evidence gathered throughout the consultation.

### **1. It is generally agreed that children need to read widely, enjoy reading and are able to find the information they need from a range of sources, evaluate it critically and synthesise their findings. In the context of the Commission’s work, are there other outcomes for children and young people, their families and parents and the wider community that we need to consider?**

The most common response from submissions, focus groups and the expert roundtable was a focus on the role a library plays in supporting children who find school life difficult through bullying, disability or both. Some respondents linked this to the Stay Safe outcome of the Every Child Matters (ECM) agenda.

Comments such as “*Address the personal well being of children and provide a safe, neutral and supportive environment, especially for children who feel threatened in a classroom setting.*” were typical, and while this is not a core outcome associated with school libraries the strength of response was overwhelming.

The themes of freedom to learn and equality of access also appeared regularly in responses, particularly

pertaining to digital inclusion. “*Address the digital divide – school libraries need to differentiate between the IT literate and technologically competent.*” Many respondents also saw tolerance as an important outcome associated with libraries.

Many respondents, particularly those in the focus groups believed strongly that school libraries were vital for helping children to enjoy their learning, which would support their achievement. Some responses tied this to the ECM agenda, particularly the enjoy and achieve strand.

Improved outcomes through partnership working were also mentioned in many responses. It was reported that school libraries are ideally situated to “*Build links between the school and the local community*” and can provide an ideal opportunity to engage reluctant adult readers. Some explicitly tied this belief in partnership to the Building Schools for the Future agenda.

Finally, introducing children to libraries more generally was seen by many as vital. School libraries were seen to be a potential introduction to academic, public and specialist libraries.

### **2. What are the adult skills, attitudes and knowledge required to help children achieve these outcomes?**

There was a strong feeling among respondents that a professionally trained librarian is essential to run a school library effectively. However, many answers also references the importance of senior management involvement in the library as essential for success.

The specific skills most often mentioned as vital were:

- Knowledge of information handling
- Research skills
- An understanding of pedagogy and the curriculum
- ICT skills

Some written responses also focused on the need for librarians to be approachable, work well with children and being knowledgeable about children’s literature. A keen knowledge of children’s literature featured very prominently in the young people’s focus group.

Interestingly, some respondents felt that librarians should be considered ‘*teacher librarians*’ and that their pedagogical knowledge needs to improve in order for them to be considered less peripheral in the school.

This was in direct contrast to other respondents who believed that a teacher may have ‘a lack of key skills such as information handling skills or knowledge of ICT developments’ and whose other pressures may compromise their ability to do the job.

### 3. What experiences do children need in order to achieve these outcomes?

Almost every response received by the Commission focused on the need for “School libraries [to] provide children with a welcoming, supportive and informal learning setting.” Allowing children to feel comfortable and providing an environment in which they can “take risks with their learning” was seen as fundamental to libraries success.

Many felt that importance should be placed on family activities and personalised learning opportunities that promote reading. “Children should have time to read for pleasure and events such as visiting authors or competitions will encourage a love of books which will develop into a life-long reading habit.”

Along with the opportunity to become an independent reader, many respondents raised the importance of the library in preparing children for future careers, saying children need the opportunity to research online and to have reference tools, with visits from careers advisers. This answer was particularly prominent in focus groups with school staff.

The vast majority of respondents felt there was a strong sense that children needed to be given freedom in the library.

### 4. What resources do children need to achieve these outcomes?

The most regularly mentioned resources were:

- Books
- Computers
- Time given by the librarian
- The chance to meet authors, poets etc.

There was also a sense that children would benefit from specific targeted lessons in research and reference skills, although this ran in contrast to many of the submissions which suggested that freedom and

informal learning are the libraries greatest strengths.

### 5. What resources and support are required by parents, teachers and the children’s workforce to allow children to achieve these outcomes?

Many highlighted the importance of parental involvement and how school libraries should promote the importance of reading among them. There was a belief that school libraries can provide help for parents with poor basic literacy skills by providing support and resources, and some linked this into developing an extended schools agenda. Some believed that the school library should play a stronger role in helping parents ‘identify appropriate reading material’ for their children, and that access to the librarian for parents was essential for this. Some suggested that integrating library management systems with the Virtual Learning Environment was also essential.

The response from Tower Hamlets SLS suggested that it is essential that there are ‘Nationally agreed standards/quality performance indicators for a school library and that libraries are included in Ofsted inspections.’

### 6. How does the school library and school library service support the delivery of outcomes?

Similar themes to those already discussed were brought up most often in discussions about how the library supports outcomes. Freedom to learn, access to materials and resources and the interest of a trained librarian all featured in many submissions.

The focus of many responses suggested that the most valued function of Schools Library Service is its advisory role and its access to wider stock than for individual libraries. Of most interest was the submission from Islington School Library Service which states that:

*“the success of our school library service is largely due to the fact that it is based and managed within the Education Department in Islington. The service is located in the School Improvement Team and is managed by one of the school inspectors. The requirements of the service and on staff are emphatically to be part of the process of supporting schools and helping them with their developments.”*

## 7. What other agencies have a role in delivering these outcomes?

A wide range of other agencies were mentioned in answer to this question:

- Local public libraries
- Connexions
- Local youth service providers
- Adult and Community Learning Services
- Local Authority Culture departments
- Early Years and Teenage Services
- Children's Trust Board
- School Improvement Division
- SLA (School Library Association)
- ASCEL (Association of Senior Children's Library and Information Advisors)
- Local Authority Children's Services – School Improvement, Extended Schools
- The Museums Libraries and Archives Council
- Key charities such as The National Literacy Trust, The Reading Agency and Booktrust
- Schools Library Group CILIP; Youth Libraries Group CILIP

Of particular interest appears to be the role of the public library service. Many respondents mentioned good partnerships with the public library service; however, there were many overlapping areas which suggest that with constrained funding the two services could be in competition.

## 8. How could these outcomes be delivered more effectively in the future?

Answers from the open call for evidence suggested that a consistency of provision could be achieved with the introduction of minimum national standards and specific funding allocations for resources. There should be effective communication between school librarians, schools and other agencies. Many felt that there

should be more cooperation between teachers and librarians and that Inset days should be introduced to foster collaborations.

West Berkshire council suggested better outcomes could be delivered through dual use community and school libraries. This was also mentioned in various focus group settings.

More support for school librarians was identified as being needed and some suggested that a Schools Library Service should be introduced in every education authority. Better joined up working with Children and Young People's Directorates was also mentioned.

An investment in national programmes was also suggested as something that could reach a wide audience and provide resources for quality initiatives.

## 9. How can the school library and schools library service work to deliver these outcomes more effectively in the future? Please consider the following:

### *The opportunities created by developments in the curriculum.*

As the curriculum is increasingly divided thematically it was felt that Schools Library Services can supply schools with a far greater range of resources for the curriculum than individual schools are able to purchase, aiding the development of this type of learning.

Many professionals also believed that the move towards cross-curricular teaching has created an opportunity for individual librarians to apply their knowledge and creativity to provide a well-stocked library appropriate to curriculum needs.

### *The partners it should be working with*

The most commonly mentioned partners were:

- Extended schools
- Families
- Ofsted
- QCDA
- School Improvement Service

- Public Libraries
- Teaching staff
- Early years and childcare

### **The clusters and networks it should be involved in**

The most commonly mentioned were:

- Local partnerships for children
- SLA
- English Coordinators
- ASCEL (Association of Senior Children and Education Librarians)
- CILIP

### **How it should fit within the extended school system**

There was a strong feeling that the school library should not be used for detentions but solely for activities which promote positive attitudes to books, reading and literacy.

Many respondents, particularly in the local authority focus group believed school libraries had a key role to play in extended schools. They said that school libraries should be integrated with the rest of the school providing after school clubs, homework sessions and reading/writing groups. *The library should provide access to resources before school, after school and in the lunch hour.*

### **How it should work within local authority performance and delivery systems**

Some respondents felt that school libraries should feature in school improvement plans and have targets and performance indicators. Minimum standards should be introduced to ensure consistency.

### **How it could become more cost effective and efficient**

Some respondents suggested that minimum standards should be implemented and assessed for school libraries and that both individual libraries and SLS should be part of school improvement plans and assessed accordingly.

### **What the relationship should be between the school library, the school library service and the public library network**

While most respondents believed that all three services should and could work together in partnership there were some reservations expressed. For instance CILIP said *‘we must guard against the possibility of the SLS providing an excuse for individual schools not to have their own librarian.’*

In Hampshire the public library service and SLS is led by one Head of Service allowing for two complementary services. In this instance the *“SLS focuses on curriculum development while the public library focuses on the recreational resource needs of the child.”*

### **What the relationship should be between the school library, the school library service and organisations working with children and young people**

There was a tendency in the evidence to suggest that organisations working with children and young people should work more closely with school libraries, rather than to suggest ways in which school libraries could build relationships. There were suggestions of improved teacher training and other ways in which bridges could be built to school libraries.

### **What the relationship should be between the school library and school leadership in terms of target setting and monitoring to deliver the school’s priorities**

Suggestions included:

- School libraries should feature in whole school improvement plans.
- Sustained and creative use of the library, such as encouraging reading for pleasure and integrating information skills with curriculum goals, should be a part of a teacher’s annual appraisal.
- Librarians should be *‘kept in the loop’* and should be aware of school priorities through meeting regularly with the school leadership team.

### **What are the comparative challenges of establishing and popularising school libraries in areas with different socioeconomic and ethnic groupings**

While some respondents stated that *the school’s own librarian is well placed to establish the needs of pupils*



in their own catchment area, there was a consensus that more work needed to be done in this area. One response suggested that ‘schools and school libraries need to be more proactive in promoting the benefits of libraries and reading families’ while another said that ‘the library needs to reflect the diversity of the children in its book stock.’

**Can other agencies and services add value through partnerships with schools libraries or deliver these outcomes themselves?**

Responses suggested that if school libraries could create a safe and neutral environment then other agencies and partners could use the space. Connexions careers advice was mentioned in this context.

**10. What do you think needs to happen to create a sustainable and valued school library and school library service in the next ten years?**

Common responses included:

- Consistency of provision – minimum standards, equality of access (cannot be provided at an individual school level but needs to be set nationally).
- Schools should have a dedicated member of staff to run the school library, preferably a qualified librarian.
- School libraries should become a statutory requirement.
- School librarians need to be acknowledged as professionals within school and meet regularly with leadership team.
- Wider availability of specialist courses for school librarians so they can be up-to-date with latest developments.
- Teacher training needs to include the benefits of school library provision so that school libraries can be recognised and valued as key elements in a child’s development and education.
- Policy makers need to be convinced of the essential role played by librarians in literary education and to understand the relationship between schools and libraries.

- The school inspection regime should be used to encourage positive attitudes and promote good practice on the part of heads and teachers towards libraries and information centres.
- Ensure all reading spaces are welcoming, well-designed, modern and suited to the needs of the children in each school.
- A review of how school library services are funded.

## Appendix 2

### Example case studies from the open call to evidence

#### Appendix 2a

#### City of London Academy, Southwark

More than just lending books: Working in collaboration with the library staff to enrich the curriculum. At City of London Academy, we are currently developing a Transition Curriculum for Year 7 pupils. The aim of the curriculum is to aid the transition process and deliver Personal Learning and Thinking Skills to Year 7 pupils. We also aim to develop pupils’ literacy skills and provide them with transferable skills which they can use across the curriculum, for example research skills.

We found that pupils are often asked to conduct research without being taught the methods with which to do so. We decided, therefore to teach these skills to pupils, in addition to reading skills such as skimming and scanning and this resulted in the London project.

*Source: Submissions from the open call to evidence document.*

#### Appendix 2b

#### Tower Hamlets Schools Libraries Service

The Tower Hamlets Schools Library Service has been running since 1991 and covers 112 schools in the Tower Hamlets and Hackney area. The service is primarily a library of resources that teachers borrow from to support them in their classroom teaching. The benefit to the schools is that it is cost effective.

They can borrow resources, up to £35,000 worth a year, and keep them for as long as they need them, rather than having to buy them. The Schools Library Service also advises on developing reading for pleasure and creating whole-school reading cultures as well as going into schools and advising on setting up and organising libraries.

Five years ago, Gill Harris, Head of Service at Tower Hamlets developed a new service where schools are offered a qualified librarian to look after the library for a half day or a day a week. Staff changes often mean that libraries are not being maintained, but having a qualified librarian visit every week can ensure consistency. The qualified librarian also helps the schools to make best use, not just of the school's own resources, but also of the resources Tower Hamlets Schools Library Service provides. An added benefit is that the service also provides an income stream to the Schools Library Service, helping it to be more self-sustaining.

The Schools Library Service works best when all schools in the area subscribe, and provides a vital service to the schools. As Gill says, *"We know that good libraries and a strong reading culture in schools lead to higher levels of attainment. The advent of new technology means there may be a greater emphasis on online resources, but there will always be a need for resources such as artefacts, costumes and props in order to encourage creative learning, and hence a need for the School Library Service."*

*Source: Interview by Anna Jones, Marketing Officer at National Literacy Trust, with Gillian Harris, Head of Service at Tower Hamlets Schools Library Service on 16 July 2010.*

## Appendix 2c Coventry Schools Libraries Service

Closer alliance between School Improvement and a School Library Service will ensure a more cohesive message is delivered to schools and will reinforce the fact that school libraries are a support to learning since they will be supporting professional development for teachers in the same way that a school library will support pupils. In Coventry the Schools Library Service is part of Education and Learning and has been commissioned to undertake a benchmarking survey of all primary school libraries and a citywide review of library facilities to support Post 16 Education as part of an Ofsted Action Plan following an Area wide inspection of the local authority. In both cases these reviews led to significant improvements in school library provision.

At authority level there is a need for clearer planning and targets at local authority level which recognise the contribution that libraries (school, SLS and public) can and should make i.e. in the Children's Plan.

There is also need for effective, regular communication between library services, schools and other agencies involved in delivering these outcomes.

*Source: Submissions from the open call to evidence document.*

## Appendix 2d Forest Hill School, Lewisham, London

Our school library has been fundamental to developing the way we work with boys. We recognised many years ago that boys who arrived at secondary school with literacy needs felt alienated and found it difficult to access lessons. Research showed us the need to put into place a programme to raise literacy levels and provide a framework of behaviour interventions. The library spearheaded a reading trail structure for English lessons. We empowered the staff to take a lead, provided the resources and the library went from strength to strength.

Its priority is to build relationships with all new children so that they can feel recognised, known and secure in this new place. I feel very proud of the relationships which are at the heart of the library offer. The librarian is in a unique position to make a difference to a child's reading. They have the expertise to mediate between a child's reading ability and the different kinds of literature that exist for young people. It is essential that this person is a reader of contemporary children's literature as maintaining this knowledge is time-consuming and not part of a teacher's job description. Our library has created a whole school reading culture. Reading not just as a base skill but as a choice and all research shows this is essential to life choices. We believe this raising of literacy levels over the last 12 years has underpinned our steadily rising exam results.

Acquiring staff of the right calibre is essential. They need to share the Senior Leadership Team's vision for the school. They should contribute to the development of the school's teaching and learning repertoire by being a reader of educational research and bringing those new ideas and ways of working to the table. Our postholder often makes critical contributions to management thinking, takes a lead in delivering staff INSET, initiates and participates in creative curriculum partnerships. They also need to look beyond the immediate horizon and create both an online and community identity. Our librarian works closely

with the local public library system and the network of school libraries that exist in Lewisham. By doing so, opportunities are created for our students that bring them into contact with other agencies in the community and generate sufficient confidence so that they make use of other libraries throughout their lives. This is a vital link for supporting students when their school life is finally over.

With proper leadership and engagement the library experience stretches across a child's life in a way that nothing else in school does through pre-transition, Years 7-11 and post 16. The library is there regardless of administrative changes; quite simply there is nobody else that has that whole relationship with a child.

In recent years it has made the links with the world of work so that students are meeting authors and experiencing the publishing process. It provides all kinds of engagement with the production of literature which is excellent. It is a space for celebration and participation where students get affirmation. We see it as a place of outreach, student voice and enrichment.

Partnerships are a strong theme of the library's role. It creates them with students, for instance the Homework Club run with Teaching Assistants helps dismantle barriers to learning for many. We know it works well and reaches all parts of our community because of the systematic evaluation processes employed. Relationships with teachers are partnerships where they feel supported by the librarian in developing and delivering the work that needs to be done to achieve effective teaching and learning. Our library's role goes beyond supporting effective teaching and learning. It is a little like the Tardis; it is much bigger than its physical footprint. It reaches out and takes us to the next level in critical thinking.

At the heart of our vision of adding value to children's lives is a highly socialised concept of masculinity that is very much supported by this highly visible central offer. It fulfils the needs of vulnerable students for attachment which is vital if they are to succeed in a school environment. For us it is as much value as having another whole curriculum department and this is demonstrated in raised reading levels, successes at GCSE, support for coursework, research skills in the curriculum, development of Personalised, Learning and Thinking skills in collaboration with teaching staff.

Steve Brady, Headteacher  
Mick Levens, Deputy Headteacher

*Source: Submissions from the open call to evidence document.*



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