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Western Australian School Library Association

Dear Sir or Madam,

It has come to the attention of the Western Australian School Library Association (WASLA), that your school has made a decision to relinquish your Teacher Librarian (TL) position. WASLA is the professional body which represents TLs and school library staff. WASLA has recently met with David Axworthy, the Deputy Director of Schools, DET to discuss the alarming trend evident in the Government school system where school libraries are not being staffed by professional staff (TLs), but by unqualified library officers (usually parents working part time).

WASLA is surprised that schools are making these decisions particularly in view of:

* the current Federal Inquiry into teacher librarians in schools;
* the fact that NSW has mandated a TL in every school under its staffing formula;
* David Axworthy's recent acknowledgement that Library Officers do not have duty of care (and cannot under DET policy be forced to accept this responsibility);
* the special resources required for the new Australian Curriculum; including
* the generic skills continuum which involves the acquisition of information literacy, ICT literacy, literacy and digital literacy skills by students.

Recent research indicates that students are not leaving schools prepared for the information landscape of the 21st century, neither are they ready for tertiary study. All universities in WA now run core first year units that deal specifically with information literacy skills development and include the use of multiple databases, evaluating information from a wide variety of sources across multiple formats and being able to use technology as an information management tool. Current research is also indicating that teachers are not information literate and therefore do not teach these skills to their students.

The TL's role is a specialist support teacher. The TL:

* is a curriculum designer who can assist teachers to develop and evaluate engaging curriculum that uses a wide variety of quality resources appropriate for different cognitive and reading levels;
* selects resources to meet the needs of students and teachers in your school community;
* develops literacy programs to develop literacy skills across the school;
* provides a safe haven space for all students and a technology hub where expert guidance/teaching is available at all times; and
* provides teaching programs, expert knowledge as an information specialist and a controlled doorway to cyberspace and information, where safety and appropriate and ethical use are paramount.

Newton Moore has recently built a new library that is an outstanding example of how a library can become the hub of the school. To staff this library with unqualified people who are neither teachers nor information specialists fails to recognise the significance of just how important information skills are in the 21st century. Information literacy empowers the citizen. Since Google is but one of thousands of search engines, and only 5-8% of information on the Web is available in the Public Domain, students at Newton Moore will not receive an education that includes the skills necessary to enter the 21st century where technology is directing how people access and use information. Technology is creating a citizenry that is being kept ignorant simply because they do not have the necessary skills to access quality information when it is needed.

While WASLA recognises that funding is an issue for schools, we strongly urge you to reconsider the decision to eliminate the TL position. Perhaps other arrangements can be made where neighbouring schools can share a professional TL. WASLA is always available to all schools for advice and professional development for staff.

Yours sincerely

Barbara Combes, WASLA President, WA Operations

Mary Hookey, WASLA President, National Strategy and Policy