

School libraries in Aotearoa New Zealand

By *Miriam Tuohy*

Snapshot

Miriam Tuohy explores the main findings from the 2018 and 2019 surveys into School Library Services in New Zealand.

As regular readers of *Synergy* will know, there is a substantial body of international research that provides compelling evidence of the positive impact that school libraries and library staff have on student achievement, including:

- improved reading test scores
- higher academic achievement, and
- positive attitudes towards learning.

In Aotearoa New Zealand, those of us working in the school library sector look to this international research for inspiration for our own library programmes, to add weight to our advocacy efforts, and to see how our library practice compares to others.

However, the New Zealand school library landscape is not entirely analogous with the US where most of this research originates. There are significant differences between our education systems including the nature of our national curriculum and how it is delivered, the physical design of schools themselves, school administration and funding arrangements. We have more in common with Australian school libraries, although again there are differences, for example in school funding, and school library workforce training and certification.

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Unfortunately, there is a dearth of local research about school libraries here. In 2005, the New Zealand Education Review Office (ERO) published their research report *Student learning in the information landscape*. This research was informed in part by *The school library and learning in the information landscape: guidelines for New Zealand schools*, jointly published by the National Library of New Zealand and the NZ Ministry of Education (2002). Of course, much has changed in our education system and in school libraries everywhere, since these were published!

Our national surveys of school libraries

In 2018 and 2019 the National Library of New Zealand's Services to Schools conducted nationwide surveys of school libraries in Aotearoa. These were undertaken with SLANZA (School Library

Association of New Zealand Aotearoa) and LIANZA (Library and Information Association of New Zealand Aotearoa). While these surveys were not intended to gauge the impact of school libraries on student learning and achievement, they have been useful in helping establish a clearer picture of the way that our school libraries operate.

The self-governing schools model in New Zealand means that each school Board of Trustees decides what investment they will make in school library provision. There are many variables that affect their decisions about how central government- and community-provided funding is spread between competing priorities. Key amongst these is the extent to which the school community sees the library as being integral to achieving the goals and aspirations they have for learners.

Despite our international differences, I believe this last point to be something common to school libraries everywhere.

What we asked

Our 2018 survey asked respondents to describe:

- the importance of the school library in supporting reading for pleasure, literacy development, inquiry and learning across the curriculum, and students' social and emotional wellbeing
- library services offered in support of the above roles and the extent to which these are taken up by the school community generally and with reference to specific groups of learners i.e. Māori and Pasifika learners, students with learning support needs, as well as groups of students with other diverse needs such as ESOL or LGBTQIA+ students
- the physical and virtual school library spaces made available for the school community
- library staff roles and their respective hours and duties, as well as qualifications and years of experience for those staff in paid library roles
- the make-up of their school library collections, and their thoughts about likely changes in future
- the sources and value of collection development funding they receive.

In 2019, our survey explored in more detail issues relating to staffing and collections:

- school library staffing — including employment arrangements, support and continuing professional development, and remuneration
- school library collections — including information about collection development budgets, format types, and holdings.

The survey instruments are included in the appendices to the 2018 and 2019 reports.

What we found

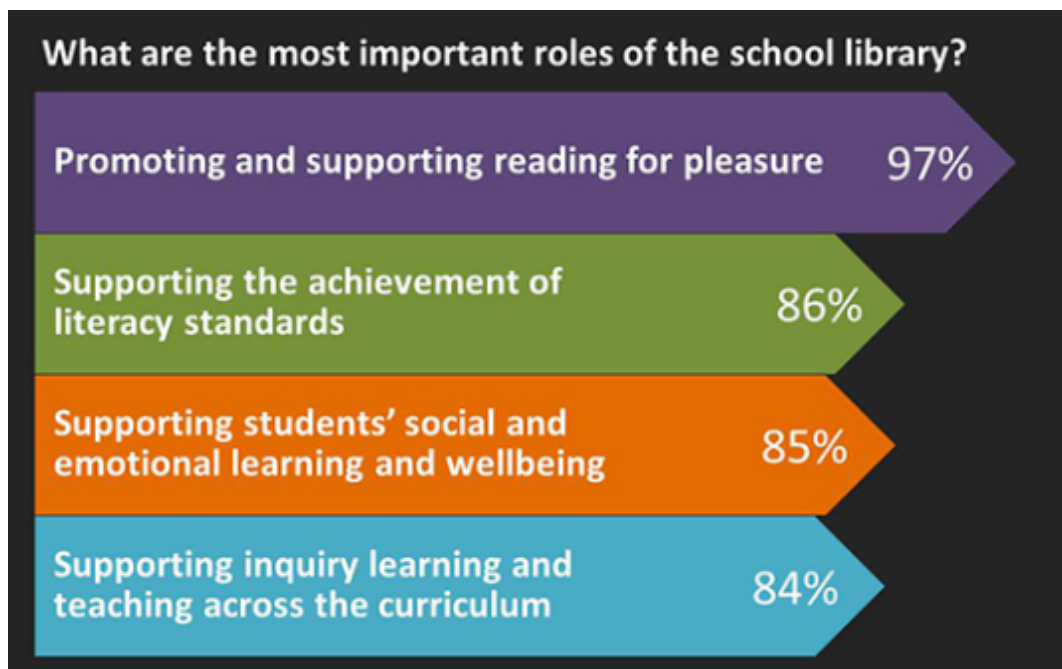
Both our 2018 and 2019 survey findings illustrate the potential for school libraries and library staff to have a greater positive impact on teaching and learning than at present. The 2018 report identifies library services where the contribution of the school library and library staff could be strengthened.

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Respondents' comments in the 2019 survey also show that there is potential to increase the utility of the school library i.e. offering effective library services that are well-used by the school community. For school management and teaching staff, this means:

- recognising the value of library staff as information professionals and experts in children's literature
- ensuring they have opportunities to use this expertise to help improve literacy, learning and well-being outcomes for students.

I'll share here summaries of some of the main findings – you can read the full reports via the Services to Schools website.



This graphic shows the percentage of respondents who said that these are important or very important roles of the school library. There is broad agreement across all school levels for these, yet in others we saw responses diverge. For example, providing access to technology was seen as more important for secondary school respondents than for primary and intermediate school respondents.

Similarly, schools catering to older students (secondary and senior composite school year levels) generally provide access to library information, services, and resources online – this is far less likely for primary and intermediate year levels.

	<p>Library staff employment arrangements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most work during term time only. • Primary / intermediate library staff usually work part time. • Secondary / composite library staff usually work full time. • Some work unpaid hours to get everything done.
	<p>Library staff skills and remuneration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 94% say their skills match or exceed their job requirements. • 47% have a Library & Information Studies qualification. • Most feel the pay doesn't match the role or responsibilities. • Some lack time or opportunities to use their expertise.
	<p>Support and professional development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most feel well supported by school leadership team. • Barriers include lack of time, resources, or understanding of the library role. • Face-to-face networks and free info online used most for PD.
	<p>Collection holdings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Still predominantly print formats. • Holdings of novels and nonfiction books are roughly equal, with fewer picture books and other graphic formats. • Commonly include digital devices students can borrow.
	<p>Collection development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasingly aimed at supporting reading for pleasure. • Print nonfiction declining as digital resourcing grows. • Digital resource concerns include access and affordability.
	<p>Collection development funding</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2019 budget average is \$13.97 per student. • 13% said their 2019 budget increased, 22% decreased. • Mainly from operational grants and community support.

Looking ahead

As I write this, New Zealand is not yet at the end of our corona virus-related 'lockdown' period, with schools closed and all students and educators at home. It could be some time before our school libraries are open again and welcoming students and staff back into their physical space — digital inclusion has been brought sharply into focus for many school librarians this term.

We had not yet begun work towards a national school library survey for 2020. How our future surveys respond to the Covid-19 pandemic — gathering data to help us understand the implications for school libraries and the people who work in them and use them — will become clearer in the months ahead.

In the meantime, I invite you to read the New Zealand school library survey reports for 2018 and 2019. There is a wealth of information in them which might inspire you to examine your own situation in a new way, prompt you to advocate for change in your own library, or just reassure yourself that you are doing a great job!

At Services to Schools, we always welcome the opportunity to share and explore ideas about the role school libraries play in supporting young people.

You can find out more about our work, access our resources to support school library development, or get in touch with us through the National Library's [Services to Schools website](#).

References

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Miriam Tuohy joined the National Library of New Zealand's [Services to Schools](#) as School Library Development Senior Specialist in 2016. Her involvement in the New Zealand education system spans early childhood education, primary and secondary school and tertiary libraries. Miriam was a member of the [School Library Association of New Zealand Aotearoa](#) (SLANZA) National Executive from 2010-2016 including a year as President in 2015-16. As part of her current role, Miriam has contributed to the publication of Services to Schools [framework for school library development](#), the [2018](#) and [2019](#) reports of the nationwide surveys of New Zealand school libraries. She is also involved in developing and delivering professional development for school library staff and teachers, and is a regular contributor to the National Library of New Zealand's [Libraries & Learning blog](#).