School Libraries in the UK – A Mixed Picture

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School libraries have long been a recognised part of schools in the United Kingdom – even though they have no statutory basis. The provision of a school library is usually due to the Head teacher (Principal) and governors in a school being in favour of a library and showing the commitment to providing one through staffing and funding.

Schools in the UK are organised in phases according to the ages of the pupils – these are broadly primary, from 4-11 years, and secondary, from 11-18 years, followed by Further or Higher Education as chosen by the student. Some areas in the UK also have a three tier system in place where First schools take 4-9 year olds, Middle schools, 9-13 year olds and Upper schools, 13-18 year olds. This mix is leavened with both state and independent schools; the local authority education body runs state schools whilst independent schools are often charities, and the school charges fees for students to attend. This diverse picture is further complicated by the fairly recent inclusion of Academies and Specialist Schools. These have been set up to have a teaching specific specialism, for example, Performing Arts, Sport, Arts or Business, and they are freed from lots of the areas of control that other state schools are subject to, particularly for academies. The UK also has a history of faith schools, i.e. schools closely allied to and run with the involvement of Church of England diocese or other faith leading bodies, most of which will take any pupil, but it will be understood that the ethos of the school follows a specific faith.

The current Government in the UK has created a huge program of change: there are Primary Academies and Free Schools, based on the Swedish model, in the UK too, as well as a big expansion in the number of Academies. Schools where provision of education from ages 0 to 19 on one site is often accompanied with various community based services, called 'all through' schools, are also relatively new developments in the UK.

All schools, whatever their form of organisation, are financially responsible for planning and spending their own budget – though the income to that budget will be from different sources dependent on their affiliation. The Senior Leadership Team (SLT) in any school, in conjunction with the Governors of the school, are responsible for setting the priorities in response to the needs of the pupils and communities and then making the budget balance. This underlines the importance placed on the support of the Head teacher in making provision for a school library and librarian – with all the conflicting financial pressures on schools, it is a committed Head that will give funds and staffing to the library in the school.

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There are several sets of guidelines available to guide the running of school libraries. The School Library Association (SLA) provides both Primary and Secondary publications (2010 & 11) plus in partnership with the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) – our professional body – a website of guidance for Primary school libraries. CILIP publishes a Secondary School Library Guidelines too. You will also be aware of the IFLA/UNESCO School Library Guidelines (2015) which are in process of being updated currently (a draft of the new guidelines are available on the IFLA School Libraries website). These share good practice of what a school library should offer as its key services and resources. Having said that, every school library is different, as it is designed and maintained to support the needs and priorities of each school and the wider community it serves.

Although the UK does have a national curriculum (with regional curricula in Wales and Scotland) schools can have a great deal of latitude in the way that they interpret the topics taught. But all schools are answerable to the Inspection service in their area – thus there is a quality control mechanism in place to ensure all students get as good an education as possible. In England, Ofsted are the inspection service and they have very specific areas to inspect; school libraries are not one of them, though they do notice libraries where they are working in specific areas of the curriculum, for example reading for pleasure.

As an organisation the SLA always recommend the appointment of a qualified school librarian to run a school library, but there is no legislation to enforce this. Consequently there are people in charge of libraries who need a great deal of support and training to help them deliver all of the services required of a school library. Training for librarians in the UK is very generic in nature, so that it should equip the librarian with all the skills a librarian may need – but this does not include any pedagogical training. This needs to be undertaken separately if the librarian wishes. (There is no requirement for school librarians to have a pedagogical qualification too.) In Primary schools (those for children up to age 11) it is very rare to find a qualified librarian running the library – hence the importance of the shrinking number of schools library services, which are usually staffed by qualified librarians. But as with any role – it really is about the right person in the right job. Someone with a passion for reading and guiding children can often make a huge impact, even if they do not have a specific qualification.

Schools Library Services

One of the most concerning trends in UK schools has been the fall in the number of library staff. In 2012 there were 2,979 full time equivalent librarians in English schools. The Department for Education's School Workforce data for England has shown a reduction of 280 librarians in two years.

It is a gloomy picture and, given the fact that school library staff have a unique role, this may mean that it is difficult to find effective library services within the school community. There will be masses of in-house wisdom on teaching and learning, the curriculum, how to handle 'little Johnny' and advice on health and safety etc. However, as lone workers library staff can feel a little isolated and nobody, not even their line manager, has a grip on where they can obtain guidance, advice and support.

Schools Library Services (SLS) are a way of providing schools with professional library support in a cost-effective way. In a recent survey 813 respondents (52.7%) said that their school subscribed to the Schools Library Service, 502 (32.6%) did not, and 199 (12.9%) did not have a Schools Library Service available. (The survey is skewed towards schools which have an SLS available partly because the SLSs took a leading role in promoting the survey.) (CILIP, 2010)

SLSs are one of the many services offered to schools in all sectors of education by local authorities and other providers. Unfortunately SLSs are not a statutory service and are generally traded organisations supported by subscriptions paid by schools. Many offer different levels of package to suit the vast array of requirements of a myriad of schools and budgets.

Each SLS has evolved in its own unique way so they are all slightly different but most, if not all of the services listed below are offered:

- The SLS will be staffed by professional librarians who, quite often, have worked in schools as teachers, librarians or both and continue to work with schools in their current capacity. They will have years of experience of children's books and reading, knowledge of how children learn and the curriculum and will know about information and its management. They will also have contacts in the Public Library and Education Department and will be able to signpost staff in the right direction if they are unable to help. They will be able to provide professional advice and support in the area of reader development, learning, the curriculum, library management and resources. The list is endless!
- Some organise a range of cultural events – poetry slams, author visits, reading festivals, book awards, reading clubs and help schools develop policies to promote reading for enjoyment throughout the school.
- Most provide a continually revised, renewed and updated range of information (non-fiction) and fiction books to support national curriculum topics, wider reading and reading for leisure and pleasure. They may also offer other resources; again the exact range varies between services but may include music CDs, DVDs, artefacts, models, story sacks, play and learn collections and access to online video clips.
- SLSs are a great place for professional development and training. Many provide courses on topical subjects often delivered by nationally recognised experts hence saving time and money travelling round the country.
- Some can help by providing a range of services to support school library staff – discounted book sales, help with cataloguing, processing of stock, advice on a new library management system, advice on library design and shelving.

When faced with tough budget decisions, some schools are choosing not to use the SLS meaning that the children miss out, and schools lose the added value and economies of scale. Over the last decade the number of SLS has declined, and a survey of public library authorities in England, Wales and Northern Ireland between July and September 2012 suggests that one in five could be facing the possibility of closure. In a quarter of respondent authorities that deliver a Schools Library Service, the Service is being reviewed and closure is a possibility. Budgets are being reduced in 40% of respondent authorities. An interesting statistic in the light of the finding is:

Where there is a Schools Library Service available it makes a positive difference, not only to the availability of books and other resources for loan, but in helping 'unqualified' school librarians to extend what they can do and in supporting school promotion of reading for pleasure (CILIP, 2010).

A list of all School Library Services can be found on the SLA web pages at http://www.sla.org.uk/links-schools-library-services-uk.php.

eBooks and eReading in school libraries

School libraries in the UK are slowly beginning to embrace eBooks but it is a very tentative journey that they are only just embarking on. Most schools that are using digital reading are doing so via an eBook platform, because of the difficulties of using eReading devices in schools; you can use Kindles within your school but if you buy content from Amazon it states in the terms and conditions of sale that this content is for personal use only and if you then lend the eBook to a student on the device you are breaking these terms. You would therefore only be able to load up your fairly expensive devices with out of copyright eBooks, from the Project Gutenberg library for example. This is a great shame as Kindle is still the most popular single use eReading device and if students have their own eReader it is likely to be one of these, yet it is also the only device that they cannot download eBooks from a platform to. There are four main platforms in use in schools and all are good products, with each having different strengths to offer to enhance reading for pleasure and teaching and learning. For example, one platform gives you the option to add content to eBooks you have purchased, attaching a video or quiz at the end, for example, and this is a very attractive function for teachers. Other platforms allow you to 'rent' books for a lower fee; this is extremely helpful for project books that are only needed for a shorter period of time. All of the platforms allow automatic return of eBooks at the end of a loan period which is a godsend – no more chasing late returns for librarians!

Borrowing of eBooks via school platforms appears to be patchy at present which is a shame, but this could be because students are using their own eReaders to buy books online or they may be using their public library service to borrow eBooks. Some

librarians have found it problematic to promote these digital resources; better ways of shining a light on the eBooks they have populated their platform with need to be found if this way of reading is going to be integrated into their library offer.

It is vital that we continue to encourage reading for pleasure via any means for the wellbeing and attainment of our students. The findings of the 2012 National Literacy Trust survey on the impact of eReading bear out the importance of this reading format: the survey found that boys from lower socio economic groups especially seemed to enjoy this way of reading, finding that, "increased reading of fiction on screen may have the potential to contribute to increased attainment for some boys" (National Literacy Trust Report, 2012). The Trust is at present conducting a targeted eReading survey, the results of which will be published in October 2015. There are arguments for and against eReading, with some surveys finding that comprehension is enhanced when reading from paper, but these results have typically been with a fairly small focus group and it is not stated whether the subjects had been used to reading from a screen before the experiment – surely this would have affected the results? The use of tablets etc. with children with Special Educational Needs has been widely acknowledged; functions such as dimming brightness, easy changing of font size and having an integrated thesaurus provide more help than any paper book can offer.

School librarians have a well-deserved reputation of being at the forefront of innovation in the field of reading promotion and are eager to embrace digital reading – despite hurdles that are needed to be jumped. They will undoubtedly lead the way into the virtual libraries of the future with confidence and enthusiasm.

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A Prep School library case study

Berkhamsted Prep is an independent day school for boys and girls aged seven to eleven. The broad educational theme is to deliver the highest possible standards of pastoral care and education both in and out of the classroom. The two specific aims from which the library draws its mission are:

> To nurture pupils' enjoyment of learning engendering a spirit of enquiry and intellectual independence encouraging the pursuit of excellence within a disciplined and stimulated learning environment.

And secondly:

> To equip pupils with the skills and qualifications they need to meet their aspirations in preparation for higher education.

For many years the prep library has been located in a typical classroom that presented many issues and restricted the activities the library could run and the number of children who could be in the space at any one time. This summer it will be relocated to a larger purposely designed library space led by Mrs Rachel Scott (Prep School librarian). Through a teacher survey, discussion with the pupils and a whirlwind of visits and research on prep school library refurbishments, contractor's plans for the new space were drawn up. In the end the school decided on BookSpace (a UK library design company) and, following the Prep School, the nursery and pre prep are laying foundations for a designated library facility working with the same company.

Research highlighted that at this age (Years 3-6, 6-11 years-old) the primary purpose was to design a space that best facilitates and inspired reading – a space to lay the foundations for a young person's educational journey – and so this is what our librarians did.

The layout for the new library is a multi-purpose space for library activities; a space, with computers, where children can develop confidence and skills and which will comfortably seat a class. A space for reading, browsing and talking books, a space for author events, visits and planned library activities and most importantly a space for the whole school community – pupils, staff and parents.

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The Prep School library has a key role in developing readers and children's literacy. The librarian is there to advise children on book choices for reluctant and keen readers and will stretch and challenge the children creating activities, quizzes and competitions for both fiction and information (non-fiction) reading. To support teachers the librarian will source special collections for class projects and provide reading lists for the classroom.

The library facility will be a creative space opening up the world of literature and reading, celebrating National Poetry Day, National Non-Fiction Day, World Book Day and will be a designated space to host a program of visiting authors and artists. Last term the library hosted a Tanya Landman week (a highly awarded UK author) which consisted of displays, book reading, competitions and a visit from Tanya. Years 2-3 had a session with her discussing her books and how her own experiences had shaped the stories. Years 5-6 had a session where they discussed the processes of her writing followed by a Q & A session. The sessions took place in other venues but the new facility will have the space for the events to actually happen in the library.

The library currently receives sixteen classes a week and the type of activities are wide ranging, from compiling a reporting activity based on *First News* (an excellent affordable first newspaper for young children), to researching the Greeks and Vikings, to carrying out instructional quizzes using both books and computers. The new facility will enable even more children to visit and open up further opportunities for projects and learning.

The new library will bring challenges but, more importantly, a wealth of opportunities and growth for the whole school. Watch this space!

Case Study from the Learning Resources Manager at Ripon Grammar School, North Yorkshire

As it is not a statutory requirement for a school to have a library (although, interestingly, it is for a prison) there are no set models or pay scales for school libraries, librarians or the status they hold within a school. This means that there is enormous variation in what is expected of the post, with some school librarians regarded simply as the guardian of a room or IT suite, whereas others are given Head of Department status and included in meetings and training along with teaching staff. I count myself lucky to belong to the latter category.

Ripon Grammar School is a selective state grammar and boarding school with approximately 850 students drawn from Ripon and the surrounding villages. There are about 250 students in the sixth form and achievement is very high. My position as Learning Resources Manager is full-time, term-time only plus 10 days, working 37 hours a week. I also have a full-time, term-time only Library Assistant.

The role is extremely varied, encompassing the duties of encouraging reading for pleasure, teaching information literacy and study skills, arranging special events such as author or illustrator visits, supervising pupil librarians, running reading groups, supporting sixth form with their Extended Project Qualification (EPQ), supporting teaching and learning with print and e-resources, liaising with local primary schools and much, much more. This is, of course, apart from the 'obvious' tasks of running a library, such as processing, cataloguing, organising and circulating resources, supervising students using the library in lesson times, during break and lunch time, managing the library booking system, assisting students and staff with photocopying, and managing the departmental budget. I would be unable to do my job to this extent without a full-time assistant.

Having the opportunity to work with year 7 pupils once a week for a Library Lesson is fantastic, giving me a chance not only to get to know their reading habits, but also to put in place a scheme of lessons teaching them how to find, evaluate and use information, hopefully sowing the seeds for them to mature into effective researchers in the future.

On a busy day recently I scribbled down just some of the tasks I completed; once again these were in addition to the 'usual' library duties outlined above:

- Finalised a PowerPoint presentation to give to Lower Sixth students detailing the support and resources available through the library for their EPQ
- Created permission letters for students and finalised staffing for a study skills visit to Sheffield University for EPQ students
- Created permission letters for students to visit the British Library at Boston Spa, North Yorkshire, to access resources for their EPQ
- Fulfilled a teacher's request to find the relevant copies of Ripon Grammar School's magazines from the 1950s, detailing the athletic achievements of the grandfather (who had recently died) of one of our current students
- Created a 'Recommended Reading' list for year 10 and year 11 students
- Prepared a 20-minute session for Lower Sixth geography students to showcase all the resources available for them through the school library, as requested by a teacher
- Helped a Sixth Form student to find information on Marxist literary criticism
- Selected some non-fiction books to use in a fun session with year 10 students
- Supervised Pupil Librarians learning how to repair damaged books.

You can see that this is extremely varied and no one day is exactly like another. This is what I love about my role. I have a timetabled lesson with each of four year 7 groups every week but, apart from that, my duties can change from day to day, and week to week, with certain tasks coming round at particular times of the year.

As Head of Department I am required to put together an annual Departmental Development Plan, reviewed twice yearly, and to set and evaluate Performance Management targets for myself, and review those of my library assistant, as her line manager. This requires me to be familiar with the Whole School Strategic Plan and to link my targets and objectives to the strategic plan. I view these tasks positively as I am being treated on a par with teaching staff.

I view it as vital to be proactive, keeping my eyes and ears open and approaching teaching staff to offer help and suggest ways of building information literacy skills into a lesson wherever possible. Sometimes they just hadn't thought of the support the library could give. Taking this approach also leads to support from the teaching staff when I need help from them, such as 'stealing' their pupils from lessons for an author visit or school trip. The role of secondary school librarian is chaotic, intense, varied and very rewarding. I wouldn't swap it for the world.

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Case study from a Sixth Form only school librarian

It was 9am on the first day of my new job in a brand new Sixth Form only school – Landau Forte Academy, Tamworth. The new staff were assembled, drinking coffee and chatting. We were still brushing masonry dust from t-shirts and jeans. It was only at this point that a thought occurred to me. *Just how do you set up a new library?*

I'd worked in lots of libraries of course and even refurbished a few but I'd never set one up from scratch. The task seemed a little daunting to say the least. It turns out what you do is unpack boxes. Lots and lots of boxes. Full of books (mainly) but also all the usual library ephemera we all take for granted, date stamps, class mark protectors, book trolleys (that was a big box), barcodes . . . *hang on, where were my barcodes?* This was my first lesson in school librarianship: I was responsible for everything.

My new school was unusual, a bit of an experiment in providing a dedicated sixth form for a whole town and for several local schools. The more usual model in the UK is for each school to provide their own sixth form teaching and library provision. This obviously offers a comfortable route for progression, with students continuing their studies with their familiar teachers and in many cases their library and library staff. The challenge here from our perspective is how to spread yourself and your budget so that it meets everyone's needs without becoming so thin that you're not serving anyone's needs well.

What this new model allowed us to do was to concentrate on a narrow client base, near to each other in age and studying just one level of qualification. This gave us a sharper focus and meant that we could concentrate in detail on the needs of one particular client group. For this group, reading for pleasure wasn't a priority. In fact, it was months after opening that we started to stock a small, but soon growing, leisure fiction selection.

The initial leisure collection had a foot in both camps, with the older reads they remembered from school mixed with recent, cult and classic adult fiction. As the collection grew in response to student requests it became much more weighted towards younger reads. For every *Magic Mountain* (by Thomas Mann) we had three or four Percy Jacksons (by Rick Riordan). We also took some very enthusiastic fans to a local comic shop where we spent seconds raiding the shelves and then hours agonising over which ones we couldn't afford and would have to put back!

When the students first arrived we issued them with their textbooks. Some educational libraries see this as a tutor or admin job but it seemed obvious to me that we already had the processes and software to do this job and were best placed to do so. Later on I would offer to source textbooks and similar material for tutorial staff. In both cases this meant a little extra work for us but meant that we had the complete information we needed.

I made a conscious effort to stock and promote electronic resources and databases and the cost of this formed a significant part of our budget. The rationale for this was that many of them, after their time with us, were heading to university or information-rich workplaces. We wanted to form a bridge between the over-reliance on naïve web searching and the more critical, in-depth research they would be required to carry out in their later lives.

There were no photocopy or resource boxes in the library; instead we showed each student how to find the information for themselves. Students (and dare I say it, teaching staff!) showed a lack of understanding in information and digital literacies and I spent a lot of time in the first two years in the post devising schemes of work, activities and strategies to address this.

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As well as training students I provided well received INSET (professional development) to staff on those themes and how they could be integrated into their teaching. I worked hard to establish myself as the book/information/data expert that we all know librarians are but are often not credited with. From the beginning I was the person who led on academic honesty. The problem was I'd spent the previous part of my career in public libraries. That was my second lesson in school librarianship: *learn fast*. I knew that I was having an effect on the whole school culture when I overheard a teacher paraphrase me in a class.

Like school librarians everywhere I ran out-of-hours clubs. We ran a student, family and staff book group (with the obligatory cakes), a creative writing group which wrote interactive fiction, and a board game group which allowed a group of SEN (Special Educational Needs) students to socialise around a focussed activity.

There were certainly hiccups along the way. We massively underestimated the books not returned in our first year, and managing the differing expectations that students had of the space (mainly noisy social space vs scholarly silence) was a learning experience that continued throughout the four years I spent there. But we achieved much in that time, sending our students off to university or work as more confident and skilled information searchers and consumers than when they first arrived.

As far as I know this is still the only dedicated sixth form school (as opposed to sixth form department or Further Education College) in the UK. Too often space and budget pressures mean that Sixth Form students aren't as well resourced as those lower down the school and they start to rely on local universities or they buy expensive textbooks themselves.

. . . a transition from receivers to curators and creators of information . . .

Library staff may not have enough time in their busy timetables to accommodate research and information seeking skills alongside the many and varied activities they run. Education at 16-18 is very much a transition from receivers to curators and creators of information and it deserves a dedicated library with specialist staff. I had somehow managed to create just such a library which met the many needs of its users

(text book repository, research centre, source of entertainment) through a combination of planning, trial and error and careful consultation with our users. And when I left, I left my successor a large box of barcodes.

Recent research and the role of the SLA in supporting school librarians

As an organisation, the School Library Association (SLA) supports many individuals in working for the benefit of their school communities through the services they provide in the school library. This we do in a very practical way through:

- Training – by offering day and residential courses in many different parts of the country
- Publications – we publish approximately 10 different titles per year, all on the various practicalities of running school libraries, and sharing good practice from other school librarians, as well as a quarterly journal
- Providing advice – via our extensive website and also in answers to email and phone enquiries from our members
- Plus we are a national voice in the need to advocate for school libraries and librarians.

Throughout the last few years there have been campaigns in England and in Wales to make school libraries and school librarians a statutory part of school provision. The situation in Scotland is slightly different -school libraries are statutory in secondary schools, but there is no statement that they must be staffed by librarians, or for how long they should be open – thus some excellent librarians face current difficulties in several places where hours and status (and salaries) are being cut.

The English campaign, a campaign to make school libraries and their librarians a statutory service originated as part of the Campaign for the Book – headed by author Alan Gibbons (2010) – after a rebuff by the UK Labour government in 2009. In Wales a petition for school libraries, and most importantly school librarians was discussed by the Welsh assembly in 2011 – but with no current change in status resulting. With all this activity, plus less than favourable UK performance in the PISA studies recently, there has been a huge media interest in the impact of libraries in general, and school libraries in particular, which has resulted in several major research activities.

A School Library Commission facilitated by the National Literacy Trust (NLT) and the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) (2010) reported in detail on the current position in the area. Interestingly, the school inspectors, Ofsted (2011) have underlined the contribution school libraries have in enabling literacy in a recent subject report:

> *The primary and secondary schools visited emphasised the school library as contributing markedly to improving literacy skills. All the schools visited had well-resourced libraries, often with computerised loan systems and facilities for accessing learning resources on an intranet. Libraries in the secondary schools were often open for much longer than the school day. This enabled students to complete their homework on the school's computers before and after school. The enthusiasm and responsiveness of the librarian generally had a direct impact on the attitudes of the students towards the library and reading.* (p. 42)

BookTrust (2007) found that:

> *Just 1% of those who run libraries in primary schools have a professional qualification. 42% of secondary school libraries are run by a chartered librarian full-time; 58% of secondary school libraries are run by staff without a professional library qualification . . . Nearly all primary schools consider the library to be important, but many are under-utilising it as a resource. Some do not have a dedicated budget for the library.* (p. 4-5)

This led to BookTrust commissioning a study of what made a successful primary school library the following year (Greenwood, Creaser & Maynard, 2008). This report is a series of case studies of successful libraries:

> *The case studies presented by the study are of rounded school libraries, which are engaging children in reading and in the use of information in ways that support the wider educational and social aspirations of the school. All of this is within, and despite, constraints of space and budget.* (p. 57)

CILIP (2010) undertook a major research project into school libraries that showed that the situation had not really changed in the past few years. Their conclusions included:

In secondary schools:

- More than half of book stocks are seen as good but 13% are patchy or poor
- Almost a third of the libraries have insufficient space
- Over half of the libraries house up to twenty computers or laptops; 17% have enough for an average class
- Almost half the library budgets for stock and resources are stuck at last year's level; almost a third have been cut, some from a very low base
- On average, independent schools spend more on stock and services than secondary schools
- Qualified librarians have more money to spend on stock and services, on average, than do other types of library manager.

While in primary schools:

- Relatively few have a designated librarian, although some professional support is usually to hand
- There is a wide disparity in times when the library is open and accessible to pupils
- There is a fairly direct relationship between pupil numbers and stock size

- Library budgets are declining.

But the librarian does make a difference, even though there were only just over half of all school librarians who had recognised qualifications:

- Professionally qualified school librarians make a positive difference
- They do more to promote reading by running reading clubs and undertaking literacy teaching
- They more frequently engage in information literacy development work – equipping students to operate in a more complex and fragmented information environment – and many of them do more, e.g. they conduct more lessons
- They do more to support learning in other ways, such as book marking websites and creating links to Internet resources
- Senior managers in schools can actively support best practice by supervising librarians effectively; too many librarians are seen as support staff rather than supporting teaching and learning

At the same time the National Literacy Trust (NLT) and the Museums Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) set up the school library commission who reported in September 2010. The report was called School Libraries: A Plan for Improvement. This was followed by a series of strong recommendations to all stakeholders in the future of school libraries but especially to the Department for Education – thus:

. . . nearly 70% of all pupils with access to a school library use it . . .

> *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 future, major education initiatives need to consider the potential role of school libraries.* (p. 18)

Sitting behind the commission's report is a large piece of work looking at young people's use of the school library (NLT, 2010) which found that nearly 70% of all pupils with access to a school library use it as they appreciate that it is a valuable resource, that it is a help to their attainment at school and that it helped them enjoy reading. The school library does make a difference – and nothing else has offers the same services and resources as the school library, they are a valuable and valued part of the school.

At a similar time the Cambridge Primary Review Trust (Alexander, 2010) was also reporting, after an intensive period of research and consultation, on a possible shape for a future primary curriculum. Alexander noted:

> *the school library featured in children's submissions as a favourite area. Optimum Education expressed concern that school libraries were often 'under-used or inaccessible' because of timetabling and space problems, whilst Ofsted noted that, in many primary schools, children were often not able to access the library and concluded that there were significant weaknesses in their funding, accommodation, resources, staffing and management.* (p. 348)

This resulted in their strongly worded recommendation that the review "strongly opposes moves to reduce children's access to [school libraries]" (p. 502).

The recent report form Robert Gordon University – the Impact of School Libraries on Learning, carried out for the Scottish Education community, had three main findings from a literature review of all the research:

- Higher test or exam scores equating to academic attainment: this includes academic attainment in the form of higher standardised test scores in reading, language arts, history and maths, and better grades in curriculum assignments or exams
- Successful curriculum or learning outcomes, including information literacy: this includes higher quality project work, the development and practice of information literacy, increased knowledge and reading development and
- Positive attitudes towards learning including increased motivation, improved attitude towards learning tasks, self-esteem, and wider reading for pleasure

This paper also identifies some of the elements that clearly contribute to these findings:

- A qualified, full-time librarian, who is proactive and has managerial status
- The availability of support staff to undertake routine tasks enabling the librarian to initiate instructional, collaborative and promotional activities as well as professional duties to support collection development
- A library that supports physical and virtual access to resources in the library, classrooms and at home, during school hours and beyond
- An adequate physical and virtual collection that is current, diverse and supports the curriculum as well as appealing to students' leisure needs
- Networked technology to support information access and use, and knowledge building and dissemination
- Instruction that supports individual and curriculum needs of students and teachers, encompassing subject content, information literacy and voluntary reading interests
- Collaboration with teaching colleagues, senior management, librarian colleagues and outside agencies, including central schools library services, to ensure the most appropriate services are delivered in support of learning.

The SLA agrees with the All Party Parliamentary Group report – The Beating Heart of the School – that a statutory duty should be placed on schools to provide library (and librarian) provision. Ofsted has set 'Making good use of the library and librarian' as one of the 10 principles of good practice for raising literacy levels even though not all schools may yet have a librarian. The inclusion of a set of standards and an inspection framework for school libraries would be feasible, indeed has existed in the past, if the

provision of a library were made statutory. The direct research for the benefits of reading for pleasure and school libraries is compelling.

There is a growing body of evidence illustrating the importance of reading for pleasure for both educational purposes as well as personal development (cited in Clark and Rumbold, 2006):

- Evidence suggests that there is a positive relationship between reading frequency, reading enjoyment and attainment (Clark 2011; Clark and Douglas 2011)
- Reading enjoyment has been reported as more important for children's educational success than their family's socio-economic status (OECD, 2002)
- There is a positive link between positive attitudes towards reading and scoring well on reading assessments (Twist et al, 2007)
- Regularly reading stories or novels outside of school is associated with higher scores in reading assessments (PIRLS, 2006; PISA, 2009)
- International evidence supports these findings; US research reports that independent reading is the best predictor of reading achievement (Anderson, Wilson and Fielding, 1988)
- Evidence suggests that reading for pleasure is an activity that has emotional and social consequences (Clark and Rumbold, 2006)
- Other benefits to reading for pleasure include: text comprehension and grammar, positive reading attitudes, pleasure in reading in later life, increased general knowledge (Clark and Rumbold, 2006).

The research I have quoted previously and the obvious benefit of a school librarian can be seen to lead to support and improvement for reading achievement in students. But practically how is this done? To close, here are a few examples from school librarians in the UK:

- Author visits – authors visiting the school to talk directly to pupils about the way they write
- Drop Everything and Read – whole school involvement when everyone in the school is seen to spend some time immersed in their book
- Reading Games – book centred activities as variations on traditional games
- Peer recommendations – post it notes of recommendations on a board, book wrappers on which people can write recommendations.
- Book clubs – could involve volunteers/parents and students. Allows the opportunity for talking about books and seeing other people's point of view of a specific book. Students don't all have to read the same book – but all can join in the discussions
- Book fairs – where students may be able to purchase their own books. In the UK these are often arranged by large booksellers on a regular basis, and school libraries can benefit from the sales made
- Book Awards – the UK has lots of local awards – there is a long list of awards as examples on our website. The CILIP Carnegie and Kate Greenaway Awards are one of the longest established in the UK and they have a formalised shadowing process – students reading the books alongside the judges. Not all awards are fiction based – we have an annual Information Book Award and there is also a comic book award the Stan Lee Excelsior Award
- Reading Champions – An idea developed by the National Literacy Trust
- Challenges – could be internal to the school or major national ones like Reading Agency Summer Reading Challenge (SRC) or the six book challenge. The SRC has shown to benefit participants as they don't have the drop in reading levels over the summer break – but in UK is run in partnership with the local public library. The SRC has materials on their website to help with schools involvement
- Patrons of Reading – started in a Welsh school with author Helena Pielichaty, and is now a growing movement in Primary and Secondarys – an author is attached to the school, and they visits over a period (1-2 years) and involve the children (all or targeted groups) in reading and writing activities. There is a growing evidence base for this, and the benefits to the students
- Having choices available to students who find it difficult to engage – many interactive apps on tablets can provide a gateway into reading; students are often put off by the length of a book – e readers 'hide' this from them. Plus e readers provide access for those with visual difficulties – eReaders can change font size easily. Also, no one else can see that you are reading at a different level from your peers on an e Reader.

Conclusion

Although the UK has some fantastic examples of excellent practice across a range of schools it seems that school libraries, librarians and their supporting organisations have a long way to go in the journey to make sure all students have access to the best that can be offered, regardless of where they live and study.

The SLA will have been in existence for 80 years in 2017. There has certainly been some amazing and innovative progress in those eight decades, but there is still a job to be brought closer to a conclusion. By our work, and by supporting our members, we aim to keep up the pressure and get a better situation than the one we have currently.

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Reading for Pleasure Web Links

Book Awards listing

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Drop Everything and Read

Patron of Reading

Readathon – a challenge

Reading Bingo

Reading Champions

Summer Reading Challenge

Six Book Challenge

World Book Day

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http://www.berkhamstedschool.org/Libraries-Boys

http://www.bsarchive.org/

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School Library Association – an independent UK charity that is committed to supporting everyone involved with school libraries, promoting high quality reading and learning opportunities for all.

www.sla.org.uk

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https://www.facebook.com/schoollibraryassociation