

School libraries in South Australia

2019 Census

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY.....	3
INTRODUCTION.....	11
WHY A SCHOOL LIBRARY IS IMPORTANT.....	15
SCHOOL BACKGROUND AND FUNDING	21
STAFFING.....	27
FACILITIES, COLLECTIONS AND ACCESS.....	34
A CULTURE OF SUPPORT.....	51
WHAT A 21 ST CENTURY SCHOOL LIBRARY LOOKS LIKE	55
CONCLUSION	61
RECOMMENDATIONS.....	61
GLOSSARY.....	63
REFERENCES.....	65
APPENDIX A: SURVEY METHODS	71
APPENDIX B: THE SCHOOL LIBRARY SURVEY.....	76
APPENDIX C: SCHOOL WEBSITE REVIEW PROTOCOL	82
APPENDIX D: AEU SA BRANCH POLICY SCHOOL LIBRARY STAFFING.....	83

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A Parliamentary Inquiry in 2011 into *School libraries and teacher librarians in 21st century Australia*, identified gaps in information regarding school libraries.

There is a fundamental need to collate some hard data to ascertain how many teacher librarians there are in Australia's primary and secondary schools; to identify where the gaps are; and to start to extrapolate the links between library programs, literacy (especially digital literacy, which is as important as regular literacy and numeracy skills), and student achievement. (House of Representatives, 2011, p.118)

In response, this report presents for the first time, the results of a survey census and website review of school libraries across all sectors (Government, Catholic and Independent) and their staffing in South Australia. The study aimed to gauge the nature of library provision and non-provision in schools, including the factors that support a school library and its staffing, as well as identifying how information services are managed when there is no staffed library provision. A literature review informed the development of a survey that aimed to overcome the issue of non-response bias and to address the absence of accurate information about the current nature of school library and information services in Australia. South Australia has pioneered this work, limiting the scope of this report to schools in South Australia. It serves as a model for education departments and policy-makers across all Australian education jurisdictions and federally, towards gaining an accurate and complete picture of school libraries and their staffing across Australia.

The lack of accurate information and 'hard data' in Australia stems from previous school library surveys being directed to the teacher-librarian, on the assumption that every school has one. Schools without a teacher-librarian or a library are much less likely to participate, biasing results. To overcome non-response bias, this study used four innovative strategies. First, the survey method used a census approach, involving every school in South Australia. Second, it was directed at school leadership (because every school does have one) and was designed to be answered by any member of the school leadership team, not just the teacher-librarian. Third, it was called the *School Library and Information Census* to avoid alienating schools without a traditional school library and to emphasise the involvement of all schools. Lastly, a review was conducted of the 'public-facing' websites of all 728 schools in South Australia (another research first) to provide additional independent evidence of a library.

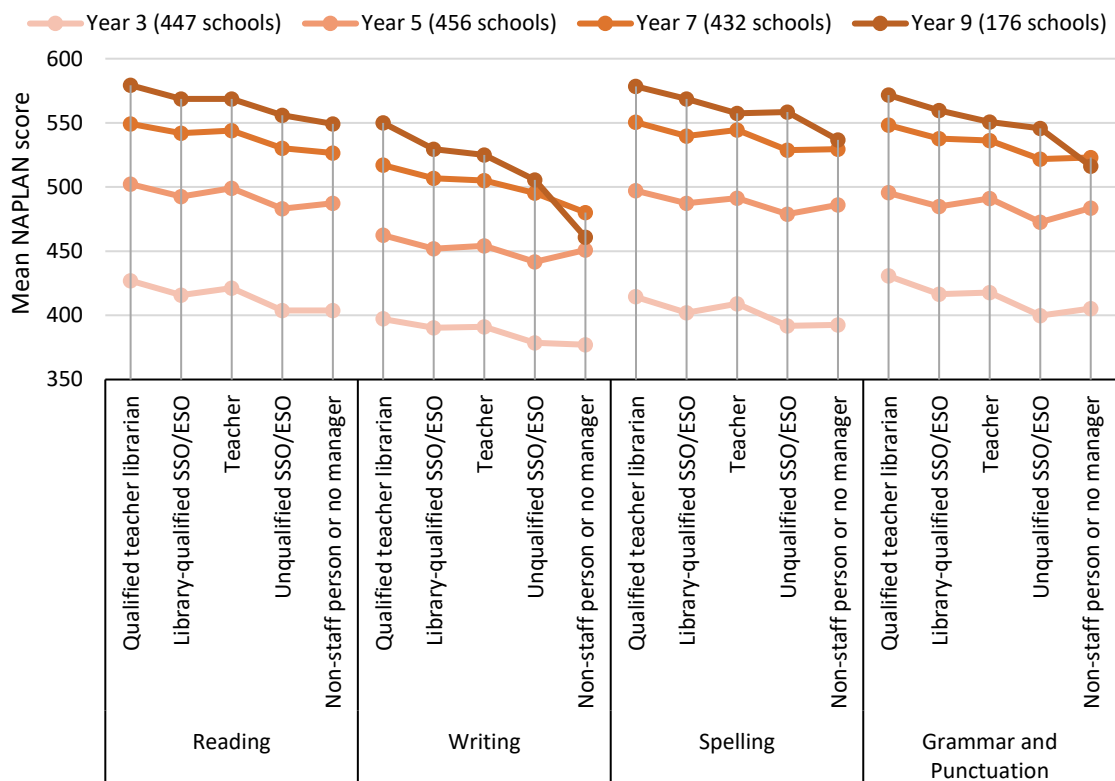
The census specifically aimed to collect data on areas related to funding, facilities, staffing, and support (each addressed below), guided by two overarching research questions:

1. What is the profile of school library staff in South Australia?
2. What are the factors that influence school libraries and their staffing?

The survey was administered by the Australian Council for Educational Research in Term 3, 2019 to the leadership of 728 schools in South Australia. All but 50 schools responded to the survey, and these schools were followed up with a brief phone call to achieve census. Almost 90% of respondents were library staff or the school principal. The 2019 snapshot that follows has yielded, for the first time, reliable and representative 'hard data' about school library and information services in South Australia, with the view to inform future policy and funding decisions.

Which schools currently have a staffed school library?

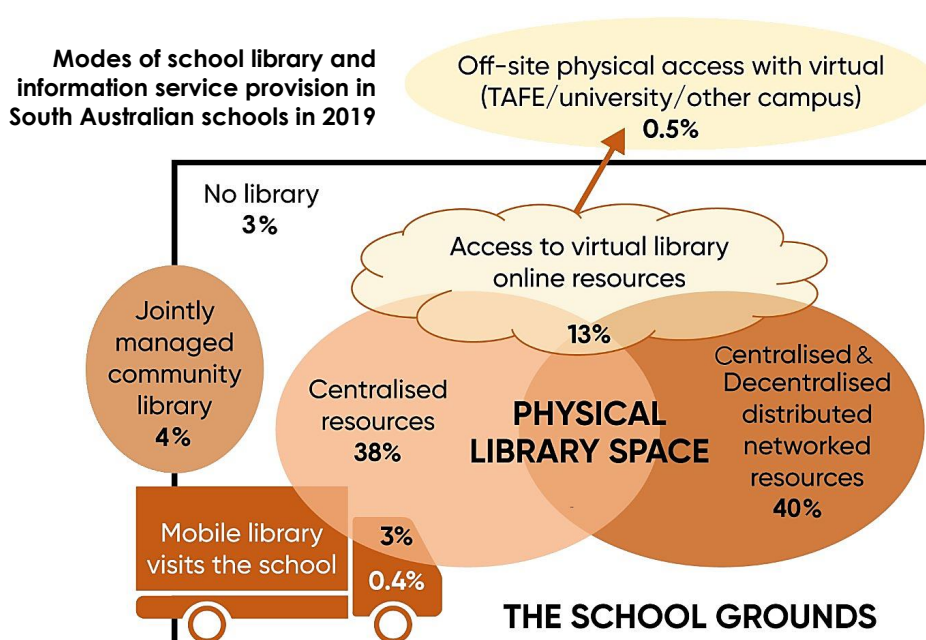
- 94% of schools have someone to manage the library collection and to select resources.
- Primary schools and combined K-12 schools with an on-site physical library, located in metropolitan or regional communities of medium SES status are *more* likely to have a library manager. Schools with an annual recurrent library budget allocation of more than \$2,500 are *more* likely to have a library manager.
- Small (<400 students) remote schools in disadvantaged communities are *less* likely to have a library manager. Secondary schools with ‘virtual’ library access and special schools are *less* likely to have a library manager.
- Having a qualified library manager matters. Schools with a qualified teacher-librarian on staff to manage resources and services, support curriculum and promote a love of reading, are more likely to have improved student literacy outcomes. Using NAPLAN 2018 data, students’ reading, writing, spelling, grammar and punctuation outcomes at Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 were found to be significantly associated with the qualification-level of the library manager. Students in schools with a qualified teacher-librarian had up to two month’s learning gain, compared to students in schools with no library manager, taking into account the effect of socio-economic status. The difference in Year 9 student literacy outcomes was particularly evident.



What models of library are currently in place?

Eight main modes of school library and information service provision to reading, research and curriculum resources exist across South Australian schools. Most schools refer to it as the *library* (60%) or the *resource centre* (16%).

- 94% of schools have a centralised library space on-site, ranging from the equivalent size of 2.2 classrooms in primary schools, to 2.8 classrooms in secondary schools, on average.
- 40% of schools with a physical library also have decentralised resource (eg. shared texts located in classrooms); 13% also have access to virtual online resources; 3% supplement their library with a mobile service.
- 4% of schools access library and information services through a jointly managed school community public library, mobile library, or other mode of off-site access.
- 3% of schools do not have a library or no evidence of a library could be found on their school website or publicly available documents (eg. context statement, newsletter).



What is the profile of staff in the library – fraction of time, qualifications?

- Most school library managers are not qualified librarians – 51% do not have an appropriate qualification in library and information service management, with 36% being an unqualified SSO/ESO.
- 23% of managers are a qualified teacher-librarian; 20% are a library-qualified SSO/ESO.
- 55% of school libraries are managed on the equivalent of less than a half-time position. 19% of library managers are funded full-time (1.0 FTE). 26% of managers are funded between 0.6 and 0.9 FTE.

- 34% of schools only have one library staff person (in part-time or full-time capacity).
- Small schools (<400 students, 66% of schools) tend to have appropriate FTE staffing levels. Larger schools (400 or more students) are under-staffed according to the AEU (2013) staffing policy for the recommended number of FTE teacher-librarians based on school size. For example, while the AEU staffing policy recommends that a large school of 1000-1200 students should have 2.5 FTE qualified teacher-librarians on staff, an average of 1.2 FTE qualified teacher-librarians are reported in schools.

School size (enrolments)		<200	200-399	400-599	600-799	800-999	1000-1199	1200-1399	1400+
Total FTE	% schools	38%	27%	16%	9%	4%	2%	2%	1%
AEU 2013 Staffing policy		0.2	0.7	1.2	1.8	2.3	2.5	3.0	3.7
Qualified teacher-librarian		0.9	0.7	0.9	1.0	1.1	1.2	1.3	0.6

How is library staff time used?

- 70% of school library staff offer reader advisory services (helping students to find their next book); 62% offered one-on-one support according to student requests or small group support to meet student needs; and 52% offer flexibly timetabled lessons. 39% offer collaborative planning with teachers and 35% provide staff professional learning.

“The library is a hub for students to enjoy the love of reading and students are pointed in directions of books of interest and research. It is a multi-use area that is enjoyed and used at all times by students/teachers.” (Regional primary school)

- School curriculum tasks that should, ideally, be managed by the teacher-librarian are being done by other school staff. For example, *research, study skills, and inquiry learning* is managed by 18% of teacher-librarians, with 55% of classroom teachers in other schools having to plan and manage this additional task. Managing the school’s *literacy and reading program* is the responsibility of 6% of teacher-librarians, and an additional task for 39% of curriculum leaders or faculty heads. Even *Copyright/Creative Commons and ethical use of information* is more likely to be the responsibility of a classroom teacher (33%) rather than a teacher-librarian (23%). Likewise developing *referencing skills* is more likely to be taught by a classroom teacher (52%) rather than a teacher-librarian (20%). This suggests there is clear opportunity to reduce the burden on classroom teachers in particular, by having qualified teacher-librarians on staff.
- As part of their role, 91% of library staff ensure that the library is a safe place for students; 88% run special events for the school community; 84% select and purchase quality learning resources, and provide curriculum support to teachers. 63% of libraries are a central learning hub, providing reading programs to nurture a love of reading.

How much dedicated space do school libraries have and how is this used?

- 79% of schools have dedicated space on-site for library activities and resources equivalent to two or more standard classrooms. 14% of schools have a classroom-sized library. 6% of schools had less than one classroom or no dedicated space.
- There is a clear relationship with school size – bigger schools have more dedicated space – ranging, on average, from almost two classrooms’ worth up to almost four classrooms’ worth. For schools with less than 200 students that have a library, the size is equivalent to 1.7 classrooms. Schools with 400-600 students generally have dedicated library space equivalent to 2.6 classrooms. Large schools with 1200-1400 students generally dedicate the space of 3.8 classrooms to library and information services.
- High SES schools, secondary schools, and metropolitan schools tend to have more dedicated space than low SES schools, special schools and school located in non-metropolitan regions.
- Over 90% of schools have shelving for shared resources, student quiet-reading spaces and borrowing services. A third of schools have a technology support centre and a quarter have a maker-space.
- 86% of schools have networked resources with laptops or tablets. 52% of schools have desktop computers in the library or computer hubs for information access.
- Larger schools tend to have more resources. Half the schools had 8-10 physical resources (eg. areas for shelving, quiet reading, borrowing, display, flexible learning, multi-media). 54% of schools provided 2-3 networked resources (eg. tablets, computer hubs, e-books).
- The *Bookmark* library management system is used in 82% of primary schools, 26% of combined schools, and 20% of secondary schools. *Access-it* is used in 3.5% of primary, 24% of combined and 30% of secondary schools.
- 37% of schools do not have any digital learning resource services, particularly if they are small and a primary or special school. Larger combined or secondary schools are most likely to have digital resources (eg. subscription databases) and a library website.
- 22% of schools report that their dedicated library space has been permanently encroached upon and repurposed, mainly due to STEM and digital learning, additional classroom space, additional staff office space, wellbeing counselling rooms, or downsizing.



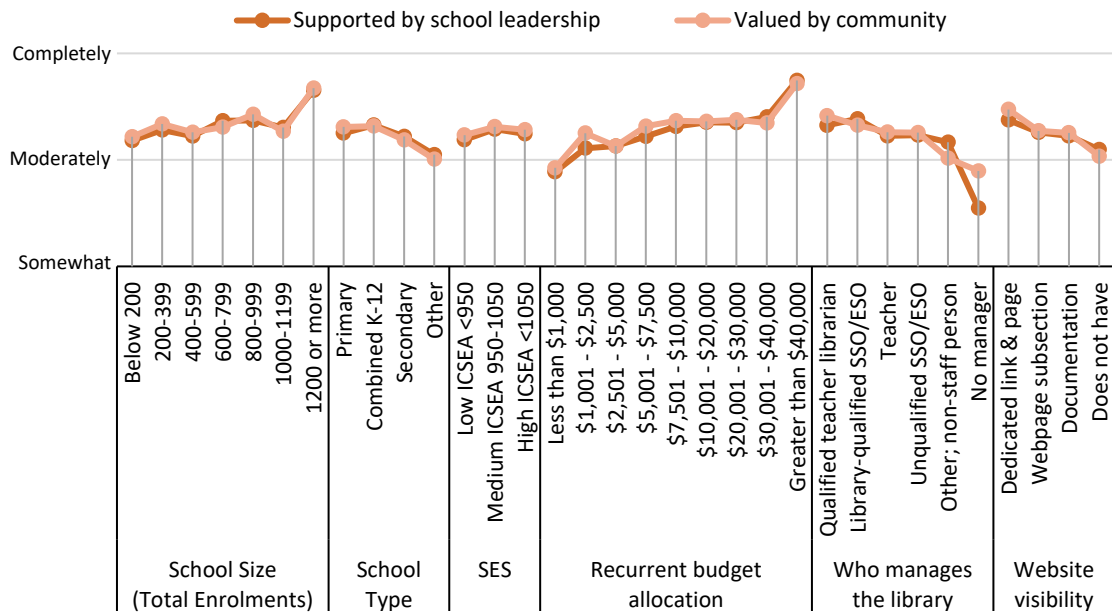
How are school libraries funded and what resources does this cover?

- 98% of school libraries are funded via school budget allocation, and have to compete with all the other demands on the limited budget. 12% of schools also fundraise for their library.
- 64% of school budgets allocated to supporting and resourcing the library (excluding staff salaries and facilities) range from \$2.5K to \$20K with a median budget of about \$7.5K.
- 18% of schools have a budget allocation of between \$2.5K and \$5K, and most of these are smaller schools below 400 students. 16% of very small schools (less than 200 students) operate on less than \$1K annually.
- 19% of schools have a budget allocation of between \$10K and \$20K, and most of these are larger schools above 600 students.
- For 62% of schools, the library budget has not changed from the previous year. However, 20% of schools report a budget decrease, partly due to declining student enrolments associated with the shift of Year 7 from being the last year of primary school to being the first year of secondary school in South Australia.
- Library budgets are associated with things like buying books, database subscriptions, e-books and licencing fee, along with refurbishment and improving technology access.

Is a culture of support reflected in a school's website?

- Regarding support, 60% of survey respondents (some of whom are principals) report that their school library and information services are '*completely supported and backed by school leadership*'. 56% of participants completely agree that their library services are *effectively managed*, 36% are *effectively funded* and 31% are *effectively staffed*.
- School libraries are significantly more likely to be *supported by leadership* and viewed as being well-managed and staffed if they are in larger schools with greater library budget allocation, managed by a qualified teacher-librarian.
- Regarding being valued by the community, 50% of respondents believe that their school library *provides resources equitably across the school community* and 35% of respondents believe their school libraries are completely *well-resourced and current*. 49% of respondents completely agree that their library and information services are *valued by the school community* and 41% believe that the library services *contribute effectively to student learning*.
- School libraries are significantly more likely to be *valued by the school community* if they are in a larger primary school, with moderate library budget allocation, managed by a qualified teacher-librarian.
- There is moderate agreement between the survey results and website evidence gathered during the review of the 'public-facing' websites of all 728 schools in South Australia. Compared to schools with *no evidence of a library* (6%), schools with a *dedicated library webpage* (16%) are more likely to have libraries that are effectively managed, well-resourced and current, and valued by the school community. These schools are also more likely to

provide resources equitably across the school community, and to contribute effectively to student learning. This finding supports Herring’s (2007, p.39) assertion that libraries that “are visible as part of the school website” do indeed reflect “the value which the school places on the school library”.



Conclusion and recommendations

This 2019 census of school libraries in South Australia suggests a diverse cohort of dedicated but under-qualified staff, managing a complex array of library and information services, often in isolation and below AEU staffing recommendations. While school library services are reported as being valued and moderately effective, the library is often overlooked and not promoted to the wider community as a valued school asset.

The evidence suggests that school libraries without a qualified teacher-librarian on staff (77% of schools), are less valued and less effective as a basic library service, and may lead to lower student literacy outcomes. Schools with a teacher-librarian show stronger NAPLAN literacy results.

While it is clear that around 6% of schools in South Australia do not have a physical on-site school library, all schools appear to have access to library-type reading, research and curriculum resources and information services, either virtually or through a community or mobile library.

Challenges ahead are evident, particularly for primary schools with the decline in enrolments due to the Year 7 shift to secondary school. There is an undertone that things are going to get worse if the budgets and floor space continue to diminish, if fewer library managers are qualified, if the culture of support declines, and if the emergence of library-less schools are normalised. Such trends run counter to the research evidence into what makes an effective 21st century school library. Accordingly, it would be prudent to replicate this census in other states and territories, and over time, in order to inform policy decisions based on ‘hard data’ identifying trends in the provision of school libraries locally and Australia-wide.

