

15 May 2011

Christine Chapman AM
Chair, Petitions Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1NA

Dear Ms Chapman

P-03-305 Statutory School Libraries

You wrote to me on 18 March 2011 seeking my views on the responses to the petition from the Minister for Children, Education and Lifelong Learning, the Minister for Heritage, the Welsh Local Government Association and the School Library Association; my response is detailed below.

Leighton Andrews AM letter of 28 November 2010.

"I believe that school libraries are a key resource for pupils and teachers which can help support literacy, the delivery of the curriculum and also introduce children to reading for pleasure. The Welsh Assembly Government recognises the valuable contribution that school libraries make to learning."

This 'key resource', however, is not available to all pupils in Wales, so there is an inequality of provision and support for literacy, the curriculum and reading for pleasure. There are schools in Wales which do not have a school library with a suitably experienced and/or qualified Librarian, and therefore the pupils of these schools are missing out on vital support, both in primary and secondary schools.

"The Welsh Assembly Government delegates funding to local authorities for all the services they provide, including schools. Local authorities then allocate funding to schools according to their priorities."

As individual schools can choose whether or not to use that funding to provide a school library with a Librarian, some will choose not to do so, or may provide very little funding - and in some cases no funding at all - for the continual update of resources which is vital.

Mr Andrews also refers to the national education priorities as set out in the Schools Effectiveness Framework (SEF) which includes the improvement of literacy levels and reducing the impact of poverty on educational attainment. He himself has stated that school libraries can help to support

literacy, yet this support is missing for many pupils in Wales; for some pupils, particularly those from a more impoverished background, the only access to a library may be the school library.

“There are no plans to make school libraries statutory in Wales. It would require investment beyond the current budget allocation to ensure that all school libraries would be sufficiently resourced to be effective.”

Without a plan to make school libraries statutory, we will continue to deny so many pupils in Wales access to this highly valuable resource. Whilst I appreciate that there are budgetary constraints, can we really continue to put a price on our children’s education to the extent that we are denying them? With a clear link between poor literacy levels and criminal behaviour, Wales could potentially save money by reducing the level of poor literacy, and therefore criminal behaviour and the need to spend money on incarceration.

“We are developing a National Literacy Plan which will include an important role for school ...libraries.” “...I will expect this activity to establish a baseline of the current provision of school libraries in Wales.”

This is a good starting point for establishing the provision available to all pupils across Wales; however, if the National Literacy Plan is to include an important role for school libraries, then surely every school should have one, rather than the current ‘luck of the draw’ situation.

In an article in TES Cymru, 26 February 2010, *Estyn Shake-Up Targets Literacy*, Estyn Chief Inspector of Education and Training Ann Keane is quoted as highlighting improving literacy as “an absolute necessity”, and she stresses the need for this to happen across the curriculum; surely the most efficient and cost-effective way of ensuring this is via the cross-curricular resource that is the school library, and in using the expertise of its staff as part of whole school strategies to improve literacy and promote reading for pleasure.

Numerous studies have indicated the relationship between reading enjoyment and higher student achievement. It is not only reading which makes an impact on achievement, but enjoyment of reading. This is something which underpins the work of school libraries, and which schools – if they are all required to have a school library with suitably qualified staff - could utilise more fully.

A survey of 17,000 young people was undertaken in 2010 by the National Literacy Trust for the School Library Commission. Their findings discovered that: “There was a very strong relationship between reading attainment and school library use, with young people who read below the expected level for their age being almost twice more likely to say that they are not a school library user. Conversely, those who read at or above the expected level were nearly three times more likely to say that they are school library users.” When questioned for the survey, students felt that this role could be carried out by no other place than the school library.

Alun Ffred Jones AM letter of 2 February 2011

“Since their implementation the Standards [Maintaining a Valued Service: The Fourth Framework of Welsh Public Library Standards 2011-2014] have had a positive impact on library services in Wales with many library authorities across Wales demonstrating significant improvements in the areas of service assessed by the standards frameworks.”

Standards could also be applied to school libraries to ensure a consistent provision of service to pupils.

“It would seem that the most recent report specifically about school libraries in Wales is the Position Paper on School Libraries and Learning Resource Centres in Primary and Secondary Schools in Wales produced by Estyn in 2002.”

As the last report into the position of School Libraries is dated 2002, more up to date research into this vital role would be most welcome.

“This [Libraries for Life strategy] has resulted in more attractive and flexible children’s and teenage areas in many public libraries and has enabled more libraries to attract school visits to their libraries to promote reading activities and raise literacy levels.”

What is the evidence to support this statement and in particular to show the number of public libraries that have more attractive children’s and teenage areas, and, more importantly, what has been the increase in school visits to local public libraries? Furthermore, school libraries particularly cater for the age range of the pupils in the school, providing access to subject resources specific to the curriculum as well as fiction specifically aimed at the pupils who attend that particular school and indeed, fiction chosen by the pupils for inclusion in *their* library.

Councillor Peter Fox WLGA spokesperson on Lifelong Learning & Skills letter of 4 February 2011

It is encouraging that the new Estyn Inspection Framework includes the requirement for inspectors to look at whether the school has a "*stimulating and well-maintained learning environment*", to look at "*enrichment of the curriculum*" and "*availability of learning resources, including library provision, and access by pupils & staff to an appropriate range of books, ICT resources, practical equipment and audio-visual materials to support learning & teaching during and outside of school hours*".

If, as Councillor Fox points out, however, inspection is "a statutory provision" and school libraries are "a subject of the inspection", what happens when a school without a library is inspected?

"School libraries were last inspected by Estyn on a thematic basis in 2002, at which time 15% of schools had unsatisfactory arrangements."

Both at the time Councillor Fox refers to in 2002, and now under the new Framework, according to what standards and criteria are schools being inspected when they *do* have a library and librarian?

In their recent 2010 survey of school libraries in the UK, the School Library Group (SLG) of the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) highlighted patchy provision for pupils across the UK– Wales fares particularly badly – with, to cite only two examples, only 17% of

schools who responded rating their stock as good with regard to support for teaching, learning and student development (83% rated it adequate or poor) and 59% of respondents in Wales rating their provision of e-licences as poor. Considering that the survey is skewed towards responses from more professionally qualified staff, whose services are possibly more likely to be better, these are even more worrying statistics for Wales.

In addition to the inspection of resources, access and environment in schools noted in the new framework, effective inspection should also take account of the wider-reaching impact of the school library on learning. As Jonathan Douglas, Director of the National Literacy Trust, is quoted as saying in an article in the TES by Helen Ward: “it’s not simply about access; it’s about the quality of provision. To have in every school a room full of books is good. But it only gets exciting if the library is integrated with teaching and learning, and a good school librarian with quality resources can do that.”

In his recent speech, *Teaching Makes a Difference*, Leighton Andrews AM quotes Ann Keane referring to a deficit of employability skills mentioned to her by a head of a Welsh engineering firm – “the ability to present something logically in writing or orally, to read and understand, to synthesize different kinds of information, to analyse and interpret then communicate...”. These are the very information literacy skills that are taught by school librarians working in partnership within their schools. Indeed the recent School Libraries Commission report notes: “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.”

Tricia Adams, Director, School Library Association letter of 27 January 2011

“Our concern is that students in schools without school libraries will not have access to a wide range of learning and reading resources to support their teaching and learning if there is no operable library.”

This highlights the need for every school in Wales to have this provision so that every child in Wales has access to a school library to support their learning, to encourage reading for pleasure and to equip them with the necessary skills to become independent learners.

Tricia Adams refers to many publications to support the valid points that she raises in the need for school libraries to be statutory.

**SI 1999 No. 728 The Prison Rules 1999 Part II Prisoners
Education and Library
Library**

33. A library shall be provided in every prison and, subject to any directions of the Secretary of State, every prisoner shall be allowed to have library books and to exchange them.

Surely it is wrong that prisoners have the right, by law, to have access to a library but the young people of Wales have no such entitlement?

The CILIP School Libraries Group Wales and the School Library Association in Wales would welcome working with the Welsh Government and other partners towards helping Wales lead the way by ensuring that every school has a statutory library with suitably qualified staff. A more up to date position paper on school libraries could be one point for action, followed by drawing up a set of School Library Standards.

We recognise that there are implications and obstacles, but would assert that effective school libraries can in fact be more cost-effective than, for example, the catch-up reading programmes currently necessary to boost our children's literacy levels, or school leavers leaving school without qualifications and skills needed for the workplace.

As all the evidence for the impact of school libraries testifies, they can contribute directly to the forthcoming National Literacy Plan vision and implementation, to the Skills agenda, to the overall drive to raise achievement for all children and young people in Wales, and many other aspects of learning which are central to the Welsh Government's education policies.

The National Literacy Trust survey in 2010 for the School Library Commission "established a solid need for a well-run school library and for the impact it could have on pupils' literacy levels; enjoyment of reading; information literacy skills and access to knowledge; on their self-esteem, confidence, sense of safety and well-being in the school community".

Making school libraries statutory in Wales would also assert the right of **all** children to access education and reach their potential.

Yours sincerely

Alison Bagshaw (Mrs)

References to reports referred to and further evidence of the need for statutory school libraries:

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<<http://www.cilip.org.uk/news-media/Pages/news110209.aspx>>

CILIP (2007). *CILIP Statement on School Librarians*. London: CILIP. Accessed 31 December 2010.

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ESTYN (2008). *Best practice in the reading and writing of pupils aged seven to fourteen years*. Accessed 6 January 2011. <www.estyn.gov.uk>

NATIONAL LITERACY TRUST and MLA (2010). *School Libraries: A plan for improvement*. London: National Literacy Trust. Accessed 20 March 2011.

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<<http://wales.gov.uk/docs/drah/consultation/110131librariesinspireen.pdf>>