

A Blueprint for a Reading Nation: The Case for School Library Infrastructure

As a qualified Library Technician and as a student for a Bachelor of Information Studies (Specialising in Children's Librarianship), I welcome the opportunity to contribute to the National Cultural Policy consultation. My perspective is uniquely shaped by years of intensive tertiary training and my current role co-leading a school library. Having managed our library through various transitions, I have seen firsthand that literature and information literacy are not merely "academic extras" but are the bedrock of a prosperous, empathetic, and innovative society. It is vital that our national policy reflects the professional infrastructure and dedicated expertise required to sustain a reading nation.

First Nations First & The Centrality of the Artist

Curriculum Curation and Australian Identity

Readers thrive when they see their own communities and histories reflected in the stories they consume. In my work, I focus on updating collections to be relevant to all students from Kindergarten to Year 12 and helping teachers curate Unit of Inquiry reading lists that reflect Australian identity. I am calling for the National Cultural Policy to:

- **Fund First Nations Collections:** Provide dedicated budgets for school libraries to purchase contemporary First Nations titles and related teacher support materials. As the country's original storytellers, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices must be at the centre of our literacy strategy.
- **Support Author Touring:** Fund paid initiatives for authors and illustrators to connect with students, ensuring that schools in all regions have access to the creators who define our national culture.

A Place for Every Story

Equality of Access

Every Australian child deserves access to high-quality books, regardless of their postcode. I support the expansion of programs that bring authors into schools and the creation of voucher schemes to get books into the hands of young readers. My work with every primary class ensures that no student is left behind in their literacy journey. This foundational support is essential for building the skills students need to navigate a world full of "addictive algorithms" that often push overseas content over local stories.

Strong Cultural Infrastructure

The Critical Necessity of Mandated School Libraries

The single most impactful inclusion for the next National Cultural Policy must be the mandating of a library in every Australian school, overseen by qualified professional staff with protected collection budgets.

My tenure began in November 2024 during a professional work placement. The level of competence and dedication I demonstrated led to an immediate request for my continued involvement. I was appointed permanently in early 2025 because I possessed the specialised skills required to maintain the complex systems of a modern library.

A school library is a sophisticated technical environment. I single-handedly manage every aspect of our library's technical lifecycle: acquisition, complex cataloguing, physical processing, borrower data management, and system maintenance. When school libraries are devalued or deemed "unnecessary" the technical integrity of the collection suffers. I find that when non-specialists attempt these tasks, errors occur that require significant time to audit and fix. We need a policy that respects the specialised expertise of Library professionals and ensures these institutions remain modern, vital resources.

Engaging the Audience

Addressing the Literacy Crisis through Community and Professionalism

Australia is currently navigating a significant reading crisis. With 30% of adults not engaging with books and 1 in 3 students failing to reach proficiency, we cannot afford a passive approach. We need targeted, research-backed national reading campaigns that speak to all Australians.

In my role, I drive engagement by ensuring the library is a "pride and joy" for the community. I maintain creative control over high-quality displays for National Day celebrations and host reading initiatives that foster a genuine love of literature. To "Engage the Audience" nationally, the government must support educators in building a visible, integrated reading culture. This includes providing schools with the tools to help parents create positive home reading environments. My participation in community events reflects my belief that the library and its staff must be a visible part of school life to build the rapport that eventually brings students into the library space.

The Library as the Heart of School Growth

The library is not merely a room within the building; it is the engine room of the school's intellectual life, and its growth creates a powerful ripple effect across every year group. We are in a unique and privileged position to expand our reach, and I see the evidence of this success in the increasing foot traffic every day. It begins with one student finding a sense of belonging or a perfect resource; they return with a friend, who then brings another, until the library becomes the natural home for student agency.

This momentum is sustained by the high-level programs we deliver, which turn curiosity into tangible achievement. Through our research and referencing workshops, through mentoring students for the **PYPx**, providing them with the sophisticated database navigation and academic honesty skills they need to succeed in their final primary years and beyond. Simultaneously, programs like the **Premier's Reading Challenge** and the **Shaun Tan Awards** provide a platform for students to test their limits and celebrate their creativity. Every time we expand our collection or our services, we aren't just adding books to shelves; we are widening the circle of engagement, ensuring that as the library grows, the academic confidence and community spirit of our students grow with it.

Protecting the Professional Pillars of a Reading Nation

Ultimately, reading is the engine of our society, driving significant improvements in education, employment, and mental health outcomes for all Australians. To ensure these benefits reach every child, I urge the Government to invest in a "reading nation" by proactively protecting the infrastructure that makes literacy possible: our schools, our collections, and, most critically, the qualified Librarians who bring them to life. By safeguarding these professional pillars, we secure a future where every student has the tools to navigate, understand, and contribute to the world.

Warm Regards,

Sarah Thompson

Library Technician