

National Cultural Policy Submission

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As a Teacher Librarian, I strongly support the inclusion in the new National Cultural Policy of a government mandate requiring every Australian school to have a fully funded library, a qualified Teacher Librarian, and qualified library support staff.

School libraries are not optional educational extras. They are essential cultural, literacy and equity infrastructure. They are often the first and most consistent cultural institutions young people engage with throughout their lives. If Australia is serious about building a culturally rich, literate, creative and informed society, school libraries must be recognised and funded as part of the nation's cultural ecosystem.

A well-resourced school library staffed by qualified professionals provides far more than access to books. It is a space where students encounter Australian stories, diverse voices, First Nations perspectives, global literature, ideas, research, creativity and community. Libraries support reading for pleasure, which is directly linked to improved literacy, empathy, wellbeing and academic achievement. They also teach critical information and media literacy skills that are increasingly essential in an era of misinformation, artificial intelligence and digital overload.

However, access to quality school library services across Australia is deeply inequitable. Many schools particularly government, regional and low socioeconomic schools have experienced reduced library staffing, inadequate budgets and the replacement of qualified Teacher Librarians with unqualified personnel or no staff at all. In some schools, libraries are no longer functioning as active learning and cultural spaces. This creates significant inequity in students' access to literature, research support and cultural engagement. It saddens me that I work as a Teacher Librarian in an independent school offering a vibrant library service but my own children who attend a government school have no access to a Teacher Librarian or staffed school library.

The National Cultural Policy presents an opportunity to address this inequity through systemic investment. I urge the Australian Government to:

- mandate a fully funded library in every Australian school and mandate that Principals cannot reallocate those funds
- require every school library to be staffed by a qualified Teacher Librarian
- provide funding for qualified library support staff to ensure sustainable and effective library operations
- recognise school libraries as essential cultural infrastructure within national policy frameworks
- invest in diverse, contemporary and accessible collections that reflect Australia's multicultural and First Nations communities
- support partnerships between schools, public libraries, authors, publishers and cultural organisations.

Qualified Teacher Librarians are uniquely positioned at the intersection of literacy, education, culture and information. They support curriculum delivery while also fostering lifelong reading habits, inquiry skills and cultural participation. Importantly, they ensure that all young people regardless of background have equitable access to stories, knowledge and opportunities.

If Australia wants future generations who read widely, think critically, engage creatively and participate meaningfully in civic and cultural life, then school libraries must be protected, staffed and funded accordingly. The National Cultural Policy should recognise this not as an educational luxury, but as a national cultural necessity.