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Australian School Library Association National Cultural Policy Submission

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The Australian School Library Association (ASLA) is the national authority and peak body supporting school libraries, their staff, and the communities they serve across Australia. ASLA provides leadership, advocacy, professional learning and national representation to ensure every Australian student benefits from access to a high-quality school library service.

ASLA supports the National Cultural Policy and welcomes its commitment to strengthening Australia's cultural future. However, this vision cannot be fully realised without recognising and investing in school libraries as essential cultural infrastructure within every Australian school.

School libraries are unique educational and cultural spaces that connect young people with stories, ideas, knowledge and creativity. Through literature, information resources, digital content, artistic expression and cultural experiences, school libraries foster literacy, critical thinking, creativity, identity formation and lifelong engagement with culture. Yet across Australia, many school libraries remain under-resourced, inadequately staffed or absent altogether, limiting equitable access to these opportunities for students.

School libraries directly support all five pillars of the National Cultural Policy:

First Nations First

School libraries play a critical role in ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices, histories, cultures and contemporary experiences are visible, accessible and valued. Through carefully curated collections, programs and learning experiences, school library professionals support truth-telling, cultural understanding and reconciliation. School libraries create opportunities for all students to engage authentically with First Nations perspectives while enabling Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to see themselves reflected in the stories and resources available to them.

A Place for Every Story

School libraries provide inclusive spaces where every student can encounter diverse stories, perspectives and experiences. Through access to literature that reflects Australia's multicultural society and global communities, students develop empathy, understanding and a sense of belonging. Qualified school library professionals connect young people with texts that affirm identity, challenge assumptions and broaden horizons, ensuring every student can both find themselves in stories and discover the experiences of others.

Centrality of the Artist

School libraries serve as vital pathways connecting young people with Australia's writers, illustrators, storytellers and creators. Through curated collections, author and illustrator visits, literature festivals, reading initiatives and creative programs, school libraries introduce students to the work of artists and foster appreciation for creative practice. These experiences inspire students as readers, learners and emerging creators, strengthening engagement with Australia's cultural and creative sectors.

Strong Cultural Infrastructure

School libraries are enduring cultural institutions embedded within school communities. They preserve and provide access to literature, information, cultural resources and digital content while supporting equitable participation in cultural life. However, effective school libraries require sustained investment in collections, technology, facilities and qualified staff. Strengthening school libraries strengthens Australia's cultural infrastructure and ensures future generations can access and contribute to the nation's cultural heritage.

Engaging the Audience

School libraries actively cultivate engagement with culture, literature and storytelling. Through reading promotion, community events, inquiry learning, makerspaces, digital media creation and student-led initiatives, school libraries encourage young people to participate in cultural experiences rather than simply consume them. They provide opportunities for students to share their own stories, develop creative voices and contribute meaningfully to Australia's cultural landscape.

Recommendations

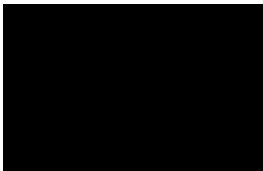
To support the goals of the National Cultural Policy, ASLA recommends that the Australian Government:

- Recognise school libraries as essential cultural and educational infrastructure within Australia's cultural ecosystem.

- Commit to equitable access to well-resourced school libraries for all Australian students, regardless of geographic location or school sector.
- Support nationally consistent standards for qualified school library staffing and professional practice.
- Invest in professional learning opportunities that strengthen the capability of school library professionals to support literacy, cultural engagement and student learning.
- Promote partnerships between schools, libraries, authors, illustrators, cultural organisations and community groups to enhance student access to cultural experiences.

Conclusion

ASLA calls for a national commitment to ensuring every Australian student has access to a well-resourced school library staffed by qualified professionals. Such a commitment aligns directly with the aspirations of the National Cultural Policy and will help create a more literate, creative, informed and culturally engaged Australia. By supporting, connecting and representing school library staff and school libraries across the country, ASLA remains committed to developing high-quality professionals, fostering collaboration and advocating for the school libraries that enrich the educational and cultural lives of all Australians.



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