

A staffed library in every school: supporting the National Cultural Policy 2026

School libraries are essential cultural and educational infrastructure that directly support all five pillars of Australia's National Cultural Policy. We call on the National Cultural Policy 2026 to include a clear commitment that every Australian student has access to a well-resourced school library, staffed by fully qualified professionals.

First Nations First

School libraries play a critical role in embedding First Nations voices, stories and perspectives into everyday learning. Through curated collections, culturally responsive programs and partnerships with Indigenous authors and artists, school libraries support truth-telling, respect and meaningful engagement with the world's oldest continuing cultures. Funding should support the purchase of resources from Indigenous publishers, Indigenous author and artist visits, and professional learning that helps school library staff decolonise collections and improve culturally responsive access to resources.

A Place for Every Story

School libraries ensure equitable access to diverse literature and information so all students can see themselves reflected in stories and encounter the experiences of others. They are inclusive spaces that remove barriers to participation, particularly for students in disadvantaged, regional and remote communities. School libraries also help nurture future creatives through author and illustrator residencies and direct engagement with Australian storytellers and creators.

Centrality of the Artist

School libraries connect students with Australian authors, illustrators and creators, fostering engagement with Australian storytelling, literature and the arts. School visits, residencies and literary programs provide employment opportunities for Australian creatives while inspiring young people to become readers, writers and creators themselves. Investment in school libraries strengthens audiences and supports the sustainability of Australia's creative industries.

Strong Cultural Infrastructure

School libraries are foundational cultural infrastructure, yet many have been significantly neglected. Some schools no longer have a library, and many lack qualified staff. In South Australia, fewer than 15% of schools employ a dual-qualified teacher librarian. Investment in school libraries improves literacy, digital capability, critical thinking and cultural participation, while also supporting Australian authors and publishers through the purchasing of Australian books and resources.

A National Cultural Strategy must include:

- National funding to establish or maintain school libraries

- Funding to employ qualified library staff
- A commitment to a teacher librarian in every school
- Scholarships for teachers and librarians to gain dual qualifications as teacher librarians.
- Funding for staff to undertake training to become qualified library technicians

Engaging the Audience

School libraries are where lifelong engagement with culture begins. With reading proficiency declining nationally, school libraries are essential to Australia's long-term cultural and literacy future. Teacher librarians connect young people with stories, ideas and cultural experiences, ensuring every child can access books and literature that engage and inspire them. For many students, the school library is their first or only connection to Australian stories, literature and culture.