

A staffed library in every school: building Australia's reading culture through the National Cultural Policy 2026

Students need school libraries. A strong National Cultural Policy must recognise that developing and sustaining a national reading culture is essential to Australia's cultural, social and economic future. School libraries are critical cultural infrastructure that connect young people with stories, ideas, creativity and Australian culture. Every Australian student should have access to a well-resourced school library staffed by fully qualified professionals.

First Nations First

School libraries ensure First Nations voices, stories and perspectives are embedded into students' everyday reading and learning experiences. Through curated collections, Indigenous author visits and culturally responsive programs, school libraries help young Australians engage meaningfully with the world's oldest continuing cultures. Investment is needed to support purchase of Indigenous published books, culturally responsive collections and professional learning for school library staff.

A Place for Every Story

A truly inclusive national culture requires that every child can see themselves reflected in stories while also encountering the experiences of others. School libraries are a vital "third space" where diverse Australian stories are curated, celebrated and made accessible to all students, particularly those in disadvantaged, regional and remote communities. Qualified teacher librarians ensure Australian literature is not an afterthought, but a central part of students' daily lives.

Centrality of the Artist

School libraries directly support Australian authors, illustrators and creators through book purchasing, author visits and residency programs. These programs foster creativity, inspire future writers and artists, and strengthen connections between young people and Australian storytelling. Students who engage with authors and literature are more likely to become lifelong readers and active participants in Australia's cultural life.

Strong Cultural Infrastructure

School libraries are foundational cultural infrastructure, yet many schools no longer have adequately staffed libraries and some have no library at all. Investment in school libraries and qualified teacher librarians is an investment in literacy, cultural participation and Australia's creative industries. Research consistently shows that reading for pleasure is one of the strongest indicators of future educational success and long-term cultural engagement.

A National Cultural Strategy should include:

- National funding to establish and maintain school libraries

- A qualified teacher librarian in every school
- Increased funding for diverse Australian collections
- Scholarships to increase the number of dual-qualified teacher librarians.
- Scholarships to support existing library staff to undertake library qualifications

Engaging the Audience

School libraries are where Australia's reading culture begins. Teacher librarians use evidence-based reading promotion programs and personalised recommendations to connect young people with books and foster reading for pleasure. For many children, the school library is their first or only access point to literature and Australian stories. A key focus of the National Cultural Policy should be developing and supporting a reading culture in Australia, ensuring every young person can engage with stories, creativity and culture throughout their lives.

Students need school libraries to be able to connect with and create Australian culture. School libraries and their staff are in crisis in Australia, for Australian Culture to flourish this must be addressed.