

PE1581/A

Professor Dorothy Williams Email of 3 December 2015

Dear Mr McMahon

I watched with interest the recording of the recent meeting (24 Nov) of the Petitions Committee which considered the petition to save Scotland's school libraries. You asked a question about the quantitative evidence of the impact of a professionally staffed school library on learning and attainment. I wanted to take this opportunity to add a little to the answer that Duncan Wright gave to that question.

There is in fact a large body of quantitative evidence of the positive impact of school libraries on standard attainment scores in literacy and learning in a range of subjects. That evidence is international - largely focussed in countries like USA, Australia and Canada where there have been systematic comparisons of school library provision with standardised test scores at different ages on a large scale. The review of that published evidence forms a significant element of our recent research at RGU on the Impact of School Libraries, referred to in the petition as evidence to support the current case for saving Scotland's school libraries.

We examined evidence from 21 such studies published since 2001 (in addition to a further large body of qualitative evidence). The data show statistically significant increases in attainment in reading tests, language arts (which cover writing abilities) as well as other subjects such as maths, social sciences and science.

It is this body of international evidence, developed over many years, which also identifies the presence of professionally qualified school library staff as a major factor in achieving that positive impact.

As Duncan Wright alluded to in his answer to your question, there have been no such quantitative assessments of the impact of Scottish school libraries. One of the recommendations in our report to the Scottish Library and Information Council (SLIC) was that this should be looked at in future and I know that SLIC are collecting some data annually on school library provision at the individual school level.

Nevertheless, even though we do not yet have Scottish data, the international evidence is strong and consistent and can be used as a confident indicator of the positive impact of professionally staffed school libraries on learning and attainment.

I hope this additional information helps answer your question as regards the impact of school libraries on achievement.

Kind regards

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