

## PE1581/U

Scottish Library and Information Council letter of 28 October 2016

*Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to set out a new national strategy for school libraries which recognises the vital role of high quality school libraries in supporting pupils' literacy and research skills.*

*The Public Petitions Committee agreed to seek the Scottish Library and Information Council's view on the petition.*

The Scottish Library and Information Council (SLIC) would like to thank the Public Petitions Committee for inviting the Scottish Library and Information Council to contribute to the discussion about School Libraries in Scotland.

### **The role of the Scottish Library and Information Council**

SLIC is the independent advisory body to the Scottish Government on library and information matters. It is funded through a combination of a core grant from the Scottish Government and membership subscriptions. The Scottish Government highlight in the grant letter that the funding is awarded "*to support national activity to promote, evaluate or carry out research into public libraries and/or reading across all of Scotland*". Member institutions are from local authority public library services, Higher Education Libraries, Further Education Libraries and special interest libraries such as the Scottish Poetry Library and the Library at the Royal Botanic Gardens in Edinburgh. As a membership organisation, SLIC represents its members' interests in the first instance while maintaining a healthy overview of the library sector as a whole.

### **The Scottish Library and Information Council and School Libraries**

The school library offer across Scotland varies. Some local authorities ask public library services to support the curriculum through a service level agreement, some school library services are directly delivered within the school by a qualified librarian and some pool the school and community resource within the school to support the entire community's need. Others, as we know, have recently decided to remove school library services. It is due to this governance mix that School Libraries do not feature as a distinct group within the SLIC membership.

In the interest of collaborating with the wider library community, SLIC has worked with partners to develop an evidence base to support advocacy, and also commissioned an in depth piece of research by the Robert Gordon University on the *Impact of School Libraries on Learning in 2013* ([http://scottishlibraries.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/SLIC\\_RGU\\_Impact\\_of\\_School\\_Libraries\\_2013.pdf](http://scottishlibraries.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/SLIC_RGU_Impact_of_School_Libraries_2013.pdf)).

SLIC has focussed its efforts on collaborating with partners to develop an evidence base on the work of school libraries to highlight best practice and support advocacy. In recent years this has included a quantitative data collection exercise to capture a national perspective on key areas of service delivery, as well as a pilot pupil survey which aimed to collect qualitative feedback from learners. Following the publication

of HGIOS4 (How Good Is Our School 4), SLIC convened a working group of school library managers and practitioners, earlier in 2016, to create a mapping document to embed library outcomes in the whole school self-evaluation framework. A draft document will be available early 2017.

This work built on the learning outlined in the evidence based research which the Robert Gordon University undertook.

### **The Robert Gordon University report and findings**

The report of the *Impact of School Libraries on Learning (2013)* carried out by the Robert Gordon University found that an excellent school library service supported the curriculum and improved attainment within the school.

The report states:

*“The findings reveal a considerable body of international evidence showing that school libraries impact on:*

- **Higher test or exam scores equating to academic attainment:** *this includes academic attainment in the form of higher standardised test scores in reading, language arts, history and maths, and better grades in curriculum assignments or exams;*
- **Successful curriculum or learning outcomes, including information literacy:** *this includes higher quality project work, the development and practice of information literacy, increased knowledge and reading development;*
- **Positive attitudes towards learning:** *including increased motivation, improved attitude towards learning tasks, self-esteem, and wider reading for pleasure.*

*Examination of Curriculum for Excellence documents, including experiences and outcomes for a sample of curriculum subject areas showed links with all three types of learning indicators.”*

This report evidences a direct correlation between embedding best practice in the school library environment and the positive effect on outcomes and impact.

Furthermore, SLIC supports the evidence outlined in the *Impact of School Libraries on Learning (2013)* which highlights that contributing factors in best practise are:

- A qualified, full-time librarian, who is proactive and has managerial status;
- The availability of support staff to undertake routine tasks enabling the librarian to initiate instructional, collaborative and promotional activities as well as professional duties to support collection development;
- A library that supports physical and virtual access to resources in the library, classrooms and at home, during school hours and beyond;
- An adequate physical and virtual collection that is current, diverse and supports the curriculum as well as appealing to students' leisure needs;

- Networked technology to support information access and use, and knowledge building and dissemination;
- Instruction that supports individual and curriculum needs of students and teachers, encompassing subject content, information literacy and voluntary reading interests;
- Collaboration with teaching colleagues, senior management, librarian colleagues and outside agencies, including library services, to ensure the most appropriate services are delivered in support of learning.

### **The wider role of libraries in supporting educational attainment**

SLIC is unequivocal in its support for achieving better educational attainment across Scotland and reducing inequalities. SLIC absolutely supports that every child should have equal access to books, reading materials and information. To this end SLIC has worked with key partners, such as Scottish Book Trust and the Reading Agency, to ensure that children and young people have equal access to materials in their local community.

Public Libraries in Scotland, through *Ambition and Opportunity: a National Strategy for Public Libraries in Scotland (2015-20)* see equal access to Reading, Literacy Support and Learning Opportunities as a core offer. Programmes such as *Bookbug*, *Play Talk Read*, *Read Write Count* are universally on offer across Scotland's Public Library network to ensure that every child has equal access to these learning resources and programmes. Local libraries work in partnership with local schools to provide information to support project work. No better example brings this to life than the uptake of the *First Minister's Reading Challenge* where the local school and the public library partnership ensures all pupils have equal access to the reading materials they need to take part in the *First Minister's Reading Challenge*.

To support these many programmes, public libraries host author/illustrator visits, participate in national reading initiatives such as the Summer Reading Challenge and Book Week Scotland. Classes from local schools regularly attend these events at their local library.

Local libraries support the curriculum by providing that space within the community to learn and explore outwith a formal learning setting. Many offer coding activity by trained library staff, all public library services have 3D printers, all public libraries are wifi enabled and all public libraries can support information needs.

Co-operation and the development of excellent public services is a key strategic aim within *Ambition and Opportunity*. Given the differing governance models, identified above, for School Libraries and different funding mixes to support them, it is clear that aspiring to high quality experiences within the School Library and delivering best practice regardless of context is what assists with raising attainment.

### **Conclusion**

The Scottish Library and Information Council continues to work with school library managers and key practitioners to ensure library outcomes are embedded in the whole school self-evaluation framework. SLIC views this work as essential to ensure best practise is profiled. The Robert Gordon University report, *The Impact of School*

*Libraries on Learning (2013)* evidences best practice for the School library sector and SLIC is in agreement with these findings.

SLIC works with libraries and other agencies across Scotland to support the learning needs of children and young people within the wider community. Furthermore, SLIC believes that children and young people need equal access to learning resources to ensure they have equal opportunities in life.

In conclusion, the Scottish Library and Information Council recommends that a full range of options to support the learning and educational needs of children and young people is explored to remove inequalities, raise attainment and ensure young people have equal access to the resources they require to support their formal and informal learning.

Yours sincerely,

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