

New chapter for SIG recognises vital role

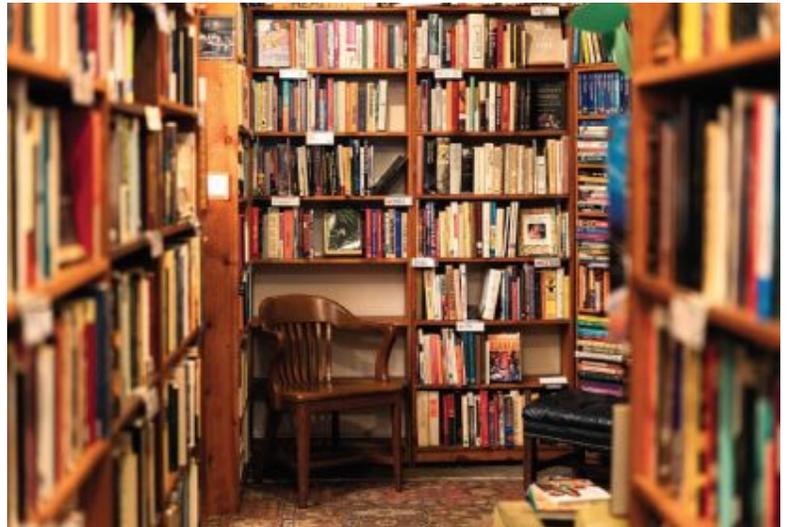


Kelly Marks
Research/Industrial Officer
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For some time, Federation has held serious concerns about the erosion of specialist positions under the State Government's Local Schools, Local Decisions policy, including the role of the teacher-librarian in NSW public schools.

Consistent with the 2019 Annual Conference decision, Guaranteeing the teacher-librarian role in schools, a Special Interest Group has been reestablished for Federation members who are teacher-librarians and a survey of teacher-librarians is being developed to further inform Federation about the extent to which the Department's library policy and school librarian staffing entitlements are being applied.

The recent revelation in the media that the new \$225 million high-rise Arthur Phillip High School does not have a dedicated school library has meant that further information in relation to these matters is urgently required.



Federation also had serious concerns that the new Arthur Phillip High School had no qualified permanent teacher-librarian to maintain the collection in the so-called "iHubs" that had been developed.

The union immediately wrote to the Department seeking clarification about the issue at Arthur Phillip High School and more broadly, seeking commitments from the Department that all:

- vacant permanent teacher-librarian positions are filled according to the staffing agreement without delay
- teacher-librarian positions are filled with qualified teacher-librarians
- teacher-librarian positions operate in schools consistent with the role described in the Department's own library policy
- schools will have an adequately resourced library.

Federation's actions had an immediate effect, with the Department agreeing to ensure that the permanent teacher-librarian position at Arthur Phillip High School would be advertised.

Crucially, in correspondence to Federation, the Department confirmed in absolute terms, that every school in NSW is provided a school library allocation in accordance with the Teacher Staffing Entitlements document and noted that: "As part of the entitlement, the library allocation cannot be deleted."

In further encouraging news for school libraries in NSW, on Wednesday 26 February all political parties

represented in the NSW Upper House agreed to a motion calling on the NSW Government to ensure every public school student in NSW has access to a quality school library and a qualified teacherlibrarian.

NSW Education Minister Sarah Mitchell is a member of the upper house that passed the motion unanimously. Unfortunately, there is much more work to be done to protect the specialist teaching position in every school.

Under Local Schools, Local Decisions, instead of preserving each school's community learning entitlement to the allowance of a teacher- librarian alongside general staffing provisions, schools have increasingly assigned miscellaneous other duties to teacher-librarians that diminish opportunities for students to benefit from this specialist educational role.

Federation Officers have also been chasing up unfilled vacancies and unqualified temporary teachers in the teacher-librarian position.

Federation's 2019 Annual Conference decision called for a statewide campaign to fight back against this agenda including the re-establishment of a special interest group for teacher-librarians.

All teacher-librarians who are members of Federation are encouraged to participate. Meetings will be held once a term at Teachers Federation House, 23-33 Mary Street, Surry Hills at 4.30pm.

The next meeting will be held on 5 May. Teleconference facilities will be made available for members in rural and regional NSW or for those members who would find it more convenient for other reasons. To be added to the SIG's mailing list contact Federation on (02) 9217 2100 or 1300 654 369.

Special Interest Groups are not decision-making bodies under the rules of Federation. However, the feedback and expertise they provide in shaping the union's policies and campaigns are invaluable. While many members are already very active in their workplaces and associations in advocating collectively on school library matters, it is hoped that with the special interest group teacher-librarians will find a supportive network of fellow Federation activists passionate about the role of the teacher-librarian and the school library in our schools.

In an era of fake news and the dark web, the role of a qualified teacherlibrarian in schools is more important than ever as an information manager, digital literacy provider and cultural literacy enabler.

But as noted this month by the newly appointed Children's Laureate, children's book author Ursula Dubosarsky: "Libraries are not just sources of information, they are sources of the imagination. A library symbolises a space where you would come in and know that reading is important."

Qualified teacher-librarians assist students to access reading materials suited to their ability, their age and their interest, including supporting individual students that are struggling with reading and those for whom English is an additional language or dialect.

Adequately resourced and staffed school libraries also play an important role in supporting student wellbeing beyond their academic success. According to teacher-librarian Lori Korodaj ("The library as 'third space' in your school: Supporting academic and emotional wellbeing in the school community", Scan, Vol 38, 2019), school libraries keep students safe in the following ways:

- "Cybersafe: digital literacy and citizenship
- Playground safe: different spaces for different students, a chance to keep away from other students that may seem threatening
- A safe place to try out new skills in the context of maker spaces and the ability of these spaces to build critical thinking, problem solving and self-confidence. Students can also shine in roles of responsibility as a library monitor, taking on shelving duties, or being the 'IT troubleshooter' for other students."

After the devastation of the summer holidays many students in our bushfire- affected schools are suffering trauma. It's not hard to imagine that many of these students are seeking refuge in their school library.

It's incumbent on all of us to ensure that every student has this opportunity now and into the future.