Guidelines for prep school libraries

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About the author
- Founder & coordinator of LIPSSEE – a support group launched in 2009 specifically for anyone working in a Prep School library in the south east of England. See website: (https://preplibs.wordpress.com)
- Included in the School Library Association's *School Librarian of the Year Honours List* (2010) for her 'outstanding contribution to school librarianship'.
- Author of '*Why School Libraries Matter'* (IAPS 'Attain' magazine; Summer 2016). (https://attain.digital/issue30/attain30_article4_1.html)
- Qualified librarian (1976), currently employed at Ardingly College (West Sussex), with special responsibility for the development of the Prep School library.

List of abbreviations for library organisations referred to in document:
CILIP - Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals. The leading professional body for librarians, information specialists and knowledge managers in the United Kingdom with its own special interest group for school librarians.
IFLA - The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions. The leading international body concerned with the improvement and development of school libraries and resource centres worldwide, especially advocacy for their qualified and adequate staffing.
SLA - School Library Association. An independent, national organisation and registered charity which was founded in 1937 to promote the development of libraries in schools. Today the SLA exists to support and encourage all those working in school libraries, raising awareness and promoting good practice through an effective training and publications programme.
SLS - Schools Library Service. This is a facility offered by some local councils which provides learning resources, library-related advice, consultancy, training and support to schools. If there is not an SLS in a school's local authority it is possible to subscribe in neighbouring authorities. (See the Schools Library Services map – www.sla.org.uk/sls-map.php to find your nearest SLS).

Introduction:

Despite the overwhelming evidence that good school libraries play an important role in supporting educational attainment, many libraries are still not fulfilling this potential. The quality of Prep School library provision and practice varies considerably. Some schools strive to refurbish and develop their libraries to keep abreast of the rapid changes in technology and the information environment whilst other school libraries remain overlooked and under-resourced. These guidelines offer a recommended level of provision for Prep School libraries and have been created to assist Heads and Senior Management Teams in identifying areas which may require development in order for their school libraries to make the significant impact on student achievement that over four decades of research demonstrates is possible. Overwhelmingly, the most important factor leading to improvements in school libraries is the commitment and leadership of knowledgeable head teachers and senior managers.

So what is the purpose of a school library?

The School Library Association (SLA) believes that the purpose of a school library is:

- to provide a flexible space with a wide and inclusive range of physical and digital resources to support teaching and learning throughout the school.
- to play a vibrant role in the development of a culture that promotes wider reading, motivated readers and learners for life.
- to provide a place for collaborative learning, creativity, and for developing independent research and information literacy skills.

To achieve this the library should be well-resourced, accessible, properly staffed and fit for purpose.

STAFF

It stands to reason that the success of any school library ultimately depends upon the level of expertise of the person running it. Historically, Prep School libraries were the responsibility of a teacher, member of support staff or a parent volunteer. Research has indicated however, that there can be no substitute for the expertise of the dedicated library professional. This is someone who possesses a unique set of skills that emanate from specialised training and continued professional development and whose roles should be clearly defined to include instruction (i.e. literacy and reading promotion, information literacy), library management, school-wide leadership and collaboration, community engagement and the promotion of library services.

The Librarian: ideally this should be a designated, library qualified and experienced professional, e.g. Chartered (MCILIP) or with a first degree or Master's degree in Library and Information Science, who is employed full-time, five days a week during term time, with some additional paid working hours in the holidays.

However, this will currently be an aspiration for some schools, so until it is achieved here are two acceptable alternatives:

- a designated person who is newly qualified or in the process of studying for a library qualification, and has the support of a strong school librarians' network.
- a designated person who is 'unqualified', but initially supported by a professional librarian from for example, the Schools Library Service, a partnered secondary

school or a Prep School cluster. In this situation a considerable wealth of valuable hands-on library experience can be acquired which, when combined with the relevant training courses, can in time result in a recognised work-based qualification from the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP), e.g. Certification or Chartership.

Library Assistant: if required an assistant who reports directly to the librarian, can be trained to help with library supervision and the library's operational routine tasks such as shelving, lending, returning, creating displays and the processing of new library material. Often this task falls to a member of the school's support staff who is allocated additional hours each week to work in the library. Their presence allows the librarian time to be away from the library to liaise with teaching staff, visit classrooms to lead sessions on information literacy, attend external meetings and training sessions and complete strategic administrative tasks.

Volunteers: parents and other volunteers should not work as substitutes for paid library staff, but can make a valuable contribution in support roles based upon agreements that give a formal framework for their involvement in school library activities. With appropriate training they may perform many of the routine operational jobs, as well as help with library events and activities throughout the year. In many schools, parents are actively involved in fund-raising, author visits, book fairs and book weeks.

Pupil Librarians / Library Monitors: students may also work as school library volunteers, within well-defined roles and under supervision. Helping in the library develops a sense of responsibility, achievement and self-esteem in these children. Selected through a formal application process they can be trained to help supervise the library at break times and carry out tasks such as issuing and returning library materials, reading with the younger children, and recommending books to fellow students. For ideas on selecting and recruiting pupil librarians, organising induction and developing an effective training programme the SLA's Pupil Librarian Toolkit is invaluable.

Where staff resources are limited, supervisory systems that include the use of trained student and adult volunteers should be considered if it means the library can remain open and staffed for longer periods.

LIBRARIAN'S STATUS WITHIN THE SCHOOL

A Prep School librarian's position within the staffing structure of a school is often ambiguous, denying them the status they need to develop the library as a strategic whole school resource. School librarians are in the unique position of being able to work with teachers across all subjects and with students of all ages so reporting to a senior member of the support staff (e.g. Bursar) or teaching staff (Head of English) only limits their scope.

It is essential that everyone working in a school library should have a clear understanding of library services and policies, well defined duties and responsibilities, and properly regulated conditions of employment.

The librarian should:

- have head of department status so that he/she can play a full part in school development and act effectively and in a proactive manner to support the developing needs of all departments.

- be line-managed by a member of the Senior Management Team (SMT) with responsibility for the curriculum.
- have roles, responsibilities, competencies, qualities, and qualifications agreed and documented in a formally approved job description.
- have the authority to manage the library budget.
- be responsible for writing, implementing and updating library policies, development plans and risk assessments. Development plans are to be integrated into the overall school improvement cycle and should respond to whole school priorities.
- carry out a continual process of self-review and evaluation so that the library remains effective and responsive to educational and technological change. These evaluations are only successful if their outcomes are efficiently disseminated and used effectively to inform future action.
- be included in the school's annual appraisal and performance management scheme.
- attend staff/curriculum meetings.
- be entitled to INSET and Continuing Professional Development opportunities.
- be allowed time to network with other school librarians in the area, attend relevant meetings and actively participate in professional groups outside of school.

PHYSICAL SPACE

The school library should be exciting and welcoming, and identifiably different from a classroom. Over the last decade many schools have refurbished their libraries, developing exciting, improved, flexible spaces suitable for 21st century learning. The location of the library, its size and its environment, are crucial in ensuring its effective use by students and staff. Library location also speaks volumes about the status given to the library as a whole school resource. If it is one of the first things visitors see upon entering the school it can reinforce the message that independent learning and reading are given a high profile. There are no universal standards for the size and design of school library facilities, but it is useful to have a set of criteria upon which to base estimates if one is planning a new build or refurbishment. It is important to note, however, that the best libraries are not necessarily always the newest; many have been created gradually over time, with care and the imaginative use of space and resources.

The library should be:

- a whole-school resource.
- centrally located and in close proximity to teaching areas.
- fully accessible and on the ground floor if possible.
- appropriately lit (natural and/or artificial) with a comfortable room temperature (e.g. air-conditioning, heating) to ensure good working conditions all year round.
- a single use area that should not be used for other purposes e.g. meetings, exams, detentions etc. during opening hours.
- open and fully staffed for as much of the school day as possible (SLA recommends 08:00 until 18:00, five days a week). If this is not possible then at the very least it should be open during the busiest times of the school day including break and lunch times and before and after school.
- attractive and welcoming with serviceable furnishings, book displays and promotional materials.

- large enough to incorporate different zones for individual study, group work, research and reading for pleasure.
- able to comfortably accommodate a full class.
- a flexible learning space, the emphasis being on movable furniture that can be easily re-arranged to support multiple learning and teaching styles.
- spacious enough to accommodate a wide range of resources in a variety of different media, e.g. fiction & non-fiction books, newspapers & magazines, non-print resources such as CDs/DVDs.
- designed with shelving that is either free standing or wall mounted and ideally 1200mm high (but never more than 1500mm). Shelves should be adjustable with a back-edge support and options for face-on display. Specialist library shelving is recommended as it is designed to be fit for purpose and tested for resilience and life expectancy. Study chairs and tables should be of an appropriate size. Ideally the library furniture should be different from that used in the rest of the school - bean bags, floor cushions and small rugs all create the sense of a specialist space.
- able to provide relevant access to ICT in the form of desktop computers, mobile learning devices and/or 'bring your own devices' for research and study purposes.
- a virtual presence enabling the school librarian to promote and extend its services to the whole school community 24/7. The library should, for example have its own pages on the school website, a dedicated area on the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) or school intranet and its own social media accounts.

RESOURCES

The excellence of a school library is defined by its stock. Pupils (and teachers) who find what they want will return to use the library and will trust the library to meet their future needs. The collection should be centred not only around the curriculum but also upon the particular needs and leisure interests of the whole school community. It must also reflect the diversity of society outside the school. The building of the library collection should be a collaborative endeavour in which both teachers, as subject experts, and the children have an important role to play.

- access to library resources should be supported by a specialist computerised library management system – ideally networked throughout the school.
- simple and easy procedures are essential for the effective functioning and use of the school library e.g. resources should be organised in a logical sequence; all books should be labelled on their spines and shelves should have clear guidance and signage.
- recognised, established systems should be used, so that pupils can transfer the skills they learn between the libraries they use e.g. non-fiction arranged according to the Dewey Decimal Classification System.
- CILIP recommends that a school library should stock **a minimum** of 10 -13 quality books for every pupil on the roll. This *excludes* textbooks, structured readers, class sets and any electronic resources. If there is a shortfall in library provision a 2–5 year budget programme should be built into the library development plan to correct this.
- the book stock should mirror the school roll and increase proportionally to reflect any growth in pupil numbers.
- the proportion of fiction to non-fiction is recommended as 60/40.

- the collection should be current, attractive and accessible to users of different ages, abilities, learning styles and backgrounds.
- the library should provide access to a wide range of resources including magazines, comics, newspapers, graphic novels, picture books, films etc.
- increasingly, digital resources are becoming a part of a Prep School library's collection.
- library collections are never static but are constantly evolving in response to changes in the curriculum.
- resources need to be regularly weeded and replaced. Libraries do not have unlimited shelving and books do not remain current forever. The SLA recommends that there is a policy in place to replenish at least **10%** of the stock every year.
- as a general rule, non-fiction stock over ten years old should be discarded as it will no longer contain accurate, up to date information. For material covering topics such as Science, Technology, and Geography this is more likely to be necessary after just five years.

BUDGET

Apart from staff salaries, the most significant operating cost of most libraries is the expenditure on stock and resources. Although research studies indicate that there is a strong correlation between a well-funded school library and increased student achievement, current trends indicate that Prep School library budgets continue to suffer cuts. To ensure the currency and vitality of a school library's instructional and information base the library needs an adequate budget allocation.

- SLA recommend that schools should provide an annual library budget based on a **minimum** of £10 per pupil. This is to cover the cost of replacing outdated or worn out stock (10% of the collection every year) and filling stock gaps. Additional funds should be made available if developing new curricular areas.
- in addition to this figure there should be an allocation for subscriptions (digital and physical material), IT support, membership of professional associations, stationery and other consumables.
- the librarian should work with senior management to develop the budget and explore responsible options for the delivery of quality resources and services to the entire school community.

THE INTEGRATION OF TECHNOLOGY

The changing information landscape and highly technological environment of 21st-century schools has had a significant effect on school libraries. Increasingly they are expected to provide a diverse range of technological tools, software and expertise for the development, representation, and sharing of knowledge. Interactive white boards, e-readers, banks of iPads and Apple TVs. are now commonplace in many Prep School libraries. However, simply purchasing a number of devices and placing them in a library does not represent meaningful integration. To be truly effective, the technology must be utilised by students and staff in teaching and learning situations right across the curriculum. When technology becomes truly integrated in this way it provides countless benefits. Not only does it aid student learning, but it can improve motivation, develop confidence, creativity and problem solving skills and provide valuable support for those students with special educational needs

(SEN). School librarians, because of their knowledge of pedagogy and the curriculum and their technology and information expertise, are in a unique position to make a meaningful contribution towards the implementation of technology integration initiatives in schools; but so often they remain an untapped resource because of the obstacles they face. These include lack of resources and technical support, the attitudes of senior management as well as institutional barriers such as the school time-tabling structures. However, by identifying and working with just a few teachers across a variety of subjects and age groups who are interested in integrating technology into their everyday teaching, small pilot projects can be built up to form a bank of evidence-based practice that over time can be shared with the wider staff and used for advocacy purposes.

For the establishment of an effective technology programme the following is required:

- a librarian with the relevant status, knowledge and expertise
- proactive leadership from management in developing a vision for educational technology across the school.
- a systematic plan that focuses education technology investment on specific educational objectives.
- ongoing funding. It is not enough to merely purchase hardware and software. The budget should also allow for ongoing maintenance, updates, system support and professional development.
- access to a robust wireless network infrastructure.
- effective collaboration with the school's IT Department on the viability, compatibility, purchase and intended use of any technical resource.
- consistent and reliable technical support for maintaining, renewing and using ICT and digital learning resources.
- ongoing professional technology-related learning opportunities with dedicated time to practise and share ideas.
- the flexibility to rethink the pedagogy in order to create truly effective lessons and utilise the new technology not just to replace or amplify existing teaching practices but to transform them.
- ongoing assessment and evaluation of the programme.
- the creation of the relevant policies to keep students safe online and guide them in the appropriate use of technology.

LIBRARY PROGRAMMES AND ACTIVITIES

The library is an essential component of teaching and learning in a school, but the extent to which it can contribute is dependent upon its resources and the status and expertise of its staff. Ideally a school librarian should work in close collaboration with the head teacher, heads of departments and classroom teachers to develop and implement suitable curriculum-based library services and programmes that support teaching and learning for all. The librarian's role is to contribute knowledge and skills related to the provision of information and the use of resources to such teaching and learning activities as inquiry and project work, literacy activities and reading engagement. A school librarian should, if possible, also liaise with the wider community outside school, including book sellers, publishers, public libraries and library associations to broaden and enhance the library services they can offer.

Literacy and reader development: supporting literacy and fostering a love of reading is one of the traditional functions of a school library and remains as important as ever. A good

school librarian has   the knowledge, skills and expertise to match pupils to reading materials that satisfy their curiosity and extend their reading habits. There is strong evidence that links reading for pleasure with academic attainment but the benefits go well beyond this. Reading for pleasure also extends vocabulary, improves writing and communication skills, builds confidence and self-esteem, broadens horizons, heightens empathy, relieves stress, entertains... the list is endless.

- the library should encourage readers by providing an attractive, readily accessible comfortably furnished, welcoming environment.
- it should contain and display a wide range of relevant, attractive, up-to-date reading materials (physical and digital) at an accessible level for all reading abilities and interests which will enable students to view, not just novels, but magazines, newspapers, graphic novels, poetry, picture books, non-fiction etc. all as acceptable and respectable sources of reading for personal pleasure.
- every class in the school should have regular timetabled library lessons. For some pupils, this may be the only time outside the classroom that they encounter reading material and actually sit down and read.
- the library should offer opportunities for a range of activities from quiet reading to group book discussions and creative work.
- the librarian should have a pragmatic and flexible approach when providing reading material to users, supporting their individual preferences and acknowledging their individual rights to choose what they want to read. Research has shown that the benefits of reading are more likely to be felt when reading takes place through free choice.
- pupils should be actively encouraged to be selective and critical in their reading habits so that they develop their own particular reading interests.
- engaging the children in the planning and delivery of reading and library activities ensures that the range of reading materials available in the library reflects pupils' interests.
- students with English as a second language should have access to quality books in their own language.
- students with reading difficulties require alternative reading materials and, in some cases, may require special reading devices. The librarian should be able to cooperate with specialist teachers for these students to support their reading needs. Children with dyslexia, for example, who are given access to alternative reading materials, such as audiobooks, show improved reading skills and improved attitudes toward reading
- the librarian should also support English teachers in their work with classroom reading (e.g. helping out with recommendation of books etc.).
- the librarian should ensure the most liberal of borrowing policies and avoid, as much as possible, fines and other penalties for late returns and lost materials.
- new fiction and non-fiction materials should be promoted to both teachers and students through book talks, library displays, and information on the library's webpage.
- reading is no longer the preserve of the English Department. As reading champion the school librarian should take every opportunity to promote reading in every subject area across the curriculum.
- special events to raise the profile of reading can be organised in the library or throughout the school. These may include exhibitions, author visits, book fairs, book

clubs and international literacy days. These special events can also provide an opportunity for parental involvement in the school.

- involve parents in the process by promoting children's leisure reading at home, especially during the holidays, e.g. Summer Reading Challenge.
- harness young people's interest in technology to promote reading through, for example, live events screening, virtual reading groups, book trailers, author websites.
- make reading for pleasure a whole-school priority by allocating a set time (minimum 15 minutes) during the school day when pupils, or ideally the whole school community, engage in reading for pleasure e.g. ERIC: 'everyone reading in class'; SSR: 'sustained silent reading'; DEAR: 'drop everything and read'; DIRT: 'daily individual reading time'; SQUIRT: 'sustained quiet un-interrupted reading time'.
- create a specific Reading for Pleasure Policy which is not linked to the school's English/Literacy Policy but stands alone in its promotion and encouragement of reading as a pleasurable activity. It should be used to engrain the philosophy for a wide range of reading within the fabric of the school.

Information literacy (IL) and inquiry - based learning: information literacy is a basic human right and forms the basis for lifelong learning (UNESCO Prague Declaration, 2003). It is common to all disciplines, to all learning environments, and to all levels of education. For this reason many countries, including Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Scotland and Wales, have incorporated an information literacy framework of skills into their national educational programmes. As this has not been the case in England there is no one dominant approach to information literacy in this country and so the teaching of IL skills in our schools is piecemeal rather than comprehensive or uniform. However, it is widely recognised that to function successfully in a rapidly changing technological society our students need to become information literate. Information literacy has been described as the ability to know when and why you need information, where to find it, and how to evaluate, use and communicate it in an ethical manner (CILIP). To be truly effective the teaching of information literacy skills can no longer be the preserve of the school library but should be taught by the whole teaching fraternity and used within a real curriculum context. But librarians are information specialists and so libraries, regardless of their size and resources, will still have a central role in information literacy delivery and development and will most likely be the precursor of all IL changes in schools. In order to produce pupils who are information literate schools need to develop an information literacy programme that is adopted by all teaching staff and taught across the curriculum in a developmental progression beginning in the earliest grades. Only when these skills are taught as part of everyday lessons in the classroom will they become second nature to the children. Becoming an information literate school will have huge implications for teaching and learning. Pupils will become increasingly engaged in active, self-directed learning and project based research activities whilst teaching will become more problem and inquiry based and adventurous in its delivery. It is important to remember that the integration of an information literacy skills programme into school-wide teaching and learning will be a slow, gradual process requiring commitment and perseverance as it usually starts with small individual pilot projects.

Factors required for the successful development of a school-wide information literacy programme:

- a librarian with the relevant status, support, training, skills and time to be a driving force for information literacy in the school.
- a well-stocked library that offers access to a wide range of differentiated resources.
- the full support of senior management.

- the development of a systematic cross-curricular framework of information literacy skills, which will provide continuity, challenge and progression in pupils' learning and provide a clear and integrated developmental structure for academic staff delivering information literacy at all levels.
- the adoption of a common information literacy model which will provide staff and students with a consistent approach to the teaching and learning of information literacy across the curriculum. Such models include: Big6, The PLUS model.
- the education of pupils and the wider school community on issues of e-safety.
- effective collaboration between the library and teaching staff in the identification, planning, teaching and assessing of information skills throughout the school.
- the provision of an ongoing programme of professional development in information literacy for all classroom teachers and library staff with dedicated time to practise and share ideas.
- ongoing assessment and evaluation of the programme.

CONCLUSION

Whilst these guidelines have been developed to assist school librarians and senior management in their efforts to ensure that all students and teachers have access to effective school library programs and services, it is accepted that every school is individual and so these guidelines will need to be adapted and implemented in ways that best suit each setting.

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