

The Pupil Library Assistant of the Year Award

Why Do We Need It?

by Barbara Band and Susan Staniforth

Some of the most vocal enthusiasts of school libraries are the students who use them and this fact was brought home when a mass lobby in support of school libraries was organised for October 2012. This saw librarians, parents, authors and students marching to Parliament and meeting with their MPs. In fact, a group of sixth form students from LVS Ascot, Berkshire, attended a meeting on the day with Liz Truss (then Minister for Schools), Justin Tomlinson (then Chair of the APPG Libraries) and various people from CILIP. They spoke eloquently and confidently about the need for school libraries. Shortly afterwards, several librarian activists were contacted by another student who was writing to his headteacher to protest about the relocation of his library to a smaller and more isolated location. Again, this was an articulate and powerful message from a student who knew about the values of having a school library.

These are not isolated incidents; week after week (and indeed year after year) many students support the libraries in their schools by giving of their time and effort. Yet, sadly, too often this goes unrewarded and unrecognised. Their librarians usually hold end-of-term parties or take them on author trips; they may even get certificates given to them and a mention in assembly but compare that with the attention a sports team is given when they win a match. Or the noticeboards full of photos of students who have volunteered at charity events or taken part in a drama production. All these are, and should be, recognised, but so should the unstinting efforts of pupil library assistants and not just for their help in running the library but for the skills and

experience they are gaining in doing so.

Being a pupil library assistant brings benefits to the school, the library and the school librarian. The pupil is able to take on administrative tasks allowing the librarian time for more strategic work. They provide positive role models for the rest of the school, raising the profile of the library amongst their peers

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and generating student ownership. This is a reciprocal arrangement with the student gaining soft skills much revered by employers: teamwork, organisational and communication skills, presentation and customer service expertise as well as an increase in self-confidence and social capabilities. Not to mention that volunteering regularly in this way provides real-life work experience for students. Many of these skills are difficult to measure but are so essential in creating a self-assured individual able to successfully undertake higher education or employment. It is important to remember that the relationship between a school library and pupil library assistant creates a synergy greater than its parts.

Thus this award was set up in 2014 in recognition and celebration of all the hard work pupils across the country do to support their libraries, librarians and schools. It is a joint award between the School Libraries Group of the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) and the School Library Association, with the judging panel taken from members of both organisations. In this way, a wide range of experience is brought to the proceedings and, it is hoped, the award will reach the majority of school libraries across the country. Certainly the inaugural award saw submissions from schools in England and all three devolved nations.

In the inaugural Award, there were almost sixty nominations with seven fantastic finalists being chosen to attend the Award Ceremony in London. This was an exciting event that focused on the young people. Abbie Craske from Aylsham High School in Norfolk won the award, although the standard of all the applicants was very high and it was a challenge for the judges to make a final decision. They were looking for that special relationship between the pupil and the library, and felt that Abbie summed it up when she said: 'At our school's Open Evening in October, I was proud to tell parents and prospective students about the work we do in the





library and how wonderful our library is. In the beginning it was an escape from life – now it enhances my life. It has made such a difference to me, and it is a privilege to give something back to the place I love.’

The ceremony was held at the BT Centre in central London with special guest speaker, author Charlie Higson, who presented Abbie with the award. A range of other authors also attended and each finalist had their own ‘personal’ author who sat with them and their guests, and read out their citations. The publishers of attending authors were extremely generous and donated books for all the finalists which they were able to have signed on the day.

Invited guests included Kevin Crossley-Holland, author and President of the School Library Association, and Lord Graham Tope, current Chair of the APPG Libraries. The judging panel were also delighted that Chris Riddell, the new Children’s Laureate, created a unique piece of artwork for the award logo. Sponsors included Authors Aloud UK, Hachette Children’s Books, Macmillan Children’s Books, Peters Books and Furniture, and Puffin Children’s Books.

This year, the nominations for the 2016 award will be opening at the beginning of September 2015 and will use the following timetable:

- 31 October 2015 – closing date for nominations
- end of January 2016 – shortlist will be announced
- 12 February 2016 – deadline for finalists to submit additional information including photos
- March 2016 – awards ceremony will be held, date and venue to be arranged.

The award is open to all schools in the United Kingdom. Any pupil nominated needs to have been a pupil library assistant at the school nominating them for at least two years and the nomination will need supporting statements from the Librarian and the Head Teacher.

There will be an array of authors at the ceremony again (the panel have already been approached by authors asking if they can come!) and a guest speaker to present the award. Abbie and her Librarian Mrs Walker will also attend to talk about how winning the award has made an impact on their school and library.

The judging panel met after the award ceremony to evaluate the event and agreed that it had been extremely successful and exceeded expectations. In fact, we had only anticipated a handful of entries so were tremendously pleased at the

number of nominations received. As this is a new award and a learning curve, there have been some slight changes to the criteria; for example, schools will only be able to nominate one pupil library assistant and the student will still need to be attending that school. We will also be increasing the number of words for the pupil’s statement from 50–100 words to 250 words as this will enable them to give a fuller picture of their work within the library.

The SLA and CILIP SLG are jointly running this award again with the judging panel for the 2016 award being:

- Lin Smith, Chair of the panel and former Chair of The School Library Association, Trainer and Libraries in Schools Consultant
- Barbara Band, past President of CILIP and Librarian at the Emmbrook School, Wokingham
- Dawn Finch, Vice President of CILIP, School Library and Literacy Consultant, Children’s and YA author
- Annie Everall OBE, Authors Aloud UK
- Sue Bastone, Librarian, LVS Ascot
- Susan Staniforth, School Library Consultant.

A website has now been designed specifically for the award – www.libpupilaward.co.uk – making it easier to find up-to-date information. The nomination forms will be available on the website from September and an e-mail address has been created, libpupilaward@gmail.com, where nominations can be sent. The website also has the facility whereby you are able to send queries or questions about the award. And watch out for pages on Facebook and announcements on Twitter and Instagram so that you can keep up with developments.

The judging panel want to encourage as many school librarians as possible to nominate their pupils for this award. As Ray Dyer, MD of Peters Books & Furniture says ‘Recognising and celebrating the contribution, commitment and achievement of the Pupil Library Assistants, both in their schools and beyond, can only result in positive messages about the power of libraries, reading and young people.’

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