A new report shows the impact of teacher librarians on student outcomes.

Writing in the Sydney Morning Herald on 14 November 2017, Dr Michael Phillips, lecturer in digital technologies in the Faculty of Education at Monash University, said, “One of the challenges for ‘general capabilities’ such as ICT is that all teachers in all subject areas are supposed to contribute to student knowledge and skill development. While this is a laudable objective, it does mean that the responsibility for teaching these digital literacy skills does not reside with an easily identifiable teacher or group of teachers as the case for mathematics, English or science.”

FAIR has published a new report on the impact of school libraries and teacher librarians, focusing on the three areas where libraries make a unique contribution: reading, digital literacy, critical thinking and research skills. These three distinct represent vital elements of a student’s educational experience. They are building blocks for learning and underpin every aspect of the Australian Curriculum. However, Australia has a long way to go to ensure that all students benefit from these skills.

The Australian Early Development Census 2015 results show that nearly one in five five-year-olds in Australia are at risk of not achieving a standard of reading.

The National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy 2015 found that 37% of Year 6 students failed to reach the proficiency standard and 4% of students were not expected to get to that standard.

FAIR proposes that school libraries and teacher librarians are perfectly placed to help students achieve these outcomes and further investment in school libraries and qualified teacher librarians is essential if Australian students are to fulfil their potential.

Call for government to endorse a teacher librarian for every school

FAIR’s newly released report on the impact of school libraries and teacher librarians includes further analysis of the staff in Australia’s Schools Survey from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), which shows that in 2015 only 28% of primary teachers and 2% of secondary teachers were working in schools with 1.0 full-time equivalent secondary teachers involved in LOTE, 1.0 full-time equivalent primary teachers involved in LOTE, 1.0 full-time equivalent ICT, 1.0 primary and secondary schools, and supporting materials included databases, story books, graphic novels and how much these libraries are used.

We asked teacher librarians to respond to questions and what do they tell us?

1. Are we using qualified teacher librarians managing the library?

The campaign asked all school libraries but it was clear from the feedback that 31% of teacher librarians was an enormous asset. More than 60% of the nominations were for schools employing a teacher librarian.

“My X year 1 teacher is amazing, she makes me want to stay with us and learn.” (Primary school)

2. Are the schools open long enough?

The school library is open from 7:30 am to 4:00 pm and has extended hours for use by students, teachers and the wider community. Students often open for two to three hours a day.

“We are open from 8 am until 3:30 pm Monday to Friday, and from 8 am to 4 pm on Fridays. We also open on Sundays for a few hours during term two.”

3. Are the facilities always accessible and welcoming to students?

“We often have kids and parents dropping in before or after school. The library is open much more than we need to be open for reading, games and company. We also have a chess club once a week.”

4. Are the libraries high-speed access to the internet?

“In most of the schools in our library area there is a very good internet. Some have high-speed access to the internet.”

5. Are students encouraged to use online resources?

“Students have the capacity to suggest new resources for their usage.”

6. Are students encouraged to use online resources?

“Across the nation the school library is open every day and the students can use it any time they want.”

7. Are students encouraged to use online resources?

“Parents often have more time to read during school holidays and are more likely to use online resources.”

8. Are students encouraged to use online resources?

“The school library is a place where students can come to study.”

9. Are students encouraged to use online resources?

“We have a relationship with the local library and allow students to use it. We also encourage them to use online resources.”

10. Are students encouraged to use online resources?

“We encourage students to use the library for research purposes.”

11. Are students encouraged to use online resources?

“Students should use the internet to find information about their interests and use it for research.”

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By popular nomination, this is the list of 231 Great School Libraries for 2015.