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Y Gweinidog Tai, Adfywio a Threftadaeth
Minister for Housing, Regeneration and Heritage



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Eich cyf/Your ref P-04-305
Ein cyf/Our ref HL/05415/11

William Powell AM

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Dear William

Thank you for your letter of 14 July regarding the petition seeking statutory school libraries.

You specifically asked me 'what the impact on public library provision would be should the aims of the petition be met'.

The initial answer to this question is that a statutory responsibility for school libraries is unlikely to have a large impact on public library provision, other than on the School Library Service which many public library services provide either on their own or in regional consortia. The aim of these Schools Library Services is to provide resources and professional assistance via qualified librarians for the development of libraries in primary and secondary schools.

Following the delegation of funding to schools, many of the School Library Services have to rely on individual schools subscribing to the service. As a result of schools not subscribing, and financial pressures on schools and local authorities, funding available to maintain School Library Services has reduced with the consequential contraction of provision.

If school libraries became statutory there could be a significant increase in demand from the schools for resources, support and professional advice from the School Library Services. Current levels of School Library Service provision mean that they are unlikely to be able to meet this demand. There would be a requirement to reinvest in developing the School Library Service or a similar service to ensure a structured and efficient way of providing advice in making libraries in school statutory.

Making libraries in schools statutory would also increase the demand for qualified library staff and this could impact on the public library service if some public library staff went to work in school libraries. Based on the current level of professionally qualified library staff in Wales, it is unlikely that this increased demand could be met, especially Welsh language speakers.

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CyMAL: Museums, Archives and Libraries Wales division of the Welsh Government is active in this area in developing local access to relevant courses and providing financial assistance to enable staff to obtain suitable qualifications.

As well as the question you have asked me, I note from the petitioner's letter dated 15 May that she asks what the evidence is for the statement that public libraries in Wales now have more attractive children's and teenage areas, the actual number that have improved areas and the increase in school visits to local public libraries.

The Welsh Government has modernised 68 libraries under the Community Learning Libraries Capital Grants Programme provided by its CyMAL division. Evidence shows that this has been particularly successful in enhancing children's provision in our public libraries.

One notable example is the teenage library in Treorchy public library in Rhondda Cynon Taff which was designed in co-operation with pupils from a local school. There was an increase of 766% in items issued to teenagers comparing figures from prior to creating the teenage zone and a year after it was opened.

In the publically available annual report of the Community Learning Libraries Programme Adviser for 2010-11 the author states:

"...issues to children are increasing significantly when a programme of activity, such as school visits, is held... ." (p.6)

"In terms of attracting new customers, libraries are reporting increases in a range between 2% and 195%. Significantly, as in 2009-10 many of the new users are still those for whom specific aspects of projects were designed - schools, children and their parents, and young people in particular" (p.6)

Modernised welcoming public libraries which are attractive to children are not a substitute for good quality school libraries but contribute towards the overall impact libraries have in promoting literacy, reading for pleasure, and lifelong learning.



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