

William Powell AM
Chair, Petitions Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1NA

4 October 2011

Dear Mr Powell

P-03-305 Statutory School Libraries

Thank you for your letter dated 15th September. Please see attached response in respect of the petition in relation to school libraries.

Yours sincerely



Ann Keane
Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of
Education and Training in Wales

Petition P-03-305 : Statutory School Libraries

Estyn's view is that school library and resource centres can have an important positive impact on pupils' learning. The provision of a school library, however, does not on its own guarantee a positive outcome in terms of the development of pupils' skills. The library also needs to be well resourced and well run, and staff need to exploit its potential in their curriculum planning and in their teaching.

The requirements of the National Curriculum for both English and Welsh outline the need for pupils to experience a wide range of texts to encourage them to read for pleasure and to retrieve and process information. The strands on 'Reading' and 'Writing' in the non-statutory Skills Framework enhance these requirements further.

Our report on 'Best practice in reading and writing of pupils aged 7-14 years' (Estyn, May 2008) states that:

'School libraries and learning-resource centres can help pupils to become enthusiastic readers, discover information and learn research skills. As a result, pupils can become better learners and develop responsibility for their own learning.'

The report describes how, in best practice, school libraries and resource centres, often incorporating ICT equipment, are a central part of a school's drive to improve standards of literacy. In such schools:

'Staff have clear expectations of how the library can support learning, such as helping pupils to become enthusiastic readers, discover information and learn research skills. School policies and plans make certain that the school library is educationally inclusive in promoting and achieving use by all groups of pupils. The library accommodation is attractive and accessible to pupils in and out of school hours and there are opportunities for the wider community to share the use of the library, which helps to ensure that the library contributes effectively to lifelong learning.'

Where a school library is effective, the librarian or teacher-in-charge works to maximise the effectiveness of pupils' work, for example by helping pupils to acquire and use information retrieval skills, including the use of information and communications technology. Curriculum planning and school improvement plans recognise the central role that the library can play in developing these important skills.

The best school libraries provide a very wide range of books and non-book information sources at different levels to meet the needs and interests of all pupils.

Staff use the library to maximise pupils' learning and to complement and extend the work that pupils do in class.

The findings of the May 2008 report are supported by the findings of inspectors in the current round of school inspections, which began in September 2010. In best practice, schools have well-resourced library and resource areas which are well used and these help to improve pupils' literacy, ICT and information-finding skills. For example:

'The school library remains open until 5pm each day for pupils to access the reference, research, computer and study facilities. The school librarian is available to support pupils each evening. The communication resource base effectively supports all of its pupils to achieve their potential.' (Secondary School)

'A well-resourced central library is used daily by the children to choose books to read at home and to support classroom learning.' (Primary school)

The impact of a well-resourced and well-run school library on pupils' skill levels is clearly positive, and helps them to develop as independent learners, well able to research and direct their own learning. This is in line with the supporting documentation that the petitioners provided.

Estyn

4 October 2011