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Ofsted subject conference report: English

Good school libraries: making a difference to learning

**Better
education
and care**

London, 17 October 2005 and Sheffield, 18 October 2005

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Synopsis

The aims of the conference were to:

- share the outcomes from Ofsted's survey of good practice in 2004/05
- consider those features that distinguish good libraries in primary and secondary schools
- enable teachers, librarians and others to learn from each other and share good practice
- improve the impact of school libraries on pupils' learning.

The conferences were oversubscribed and attracted around 130 delegates with a wide range of expertise. They included: primary and secondary teachers; secondary school librarians; local authority English advisers and consultants; and members of local schools library services.

Summaries of conference sessions

The conference began with a summary of the evidence from Ofsted's recent survey into good school libraries in primary and secondary schools. This was based on over 30 visits to schools during the period 2004/05. Some of the key points in the talk were as follows:

- external influences such as Ofsted inspections or reviews by the local authority and local schools library services can have a positive impact on library development
- overall, the most important factor in good school libraries is the commitment and understanding of effective headteachers
- the best school libraries are stimulating and welcoming areas that prove popular with pupils; however, space is often too limited for the full range of purposes libraries are intended for
- funding for libraries varies greatly and rarely matches the levels recommended by library organisations
- evidence suggests a direct link between the effectiveness of a school library and the provision of well trained and qualified staff
- management of primary school libraries has improved and the best schools make good use of an identified teaching assistant with identified time to run the library
- the most effective staffing pattern in secondary schools involves a full time, qualified librarian supported by a second library assistant
- librarians especially welcomed the opportunities for training and networking usually provided by the local schools library service
- in the most effective secondary schools, the librarian has the responsibilities and role of a middle manager in the school; this helps to give good access to other departments and key members of staff
- the best libraries make effective use of a wide range of evidence for self-evaluation; however, this is a developing area in many schools

- pupil librarians make a significant contribution to effective libraries in both primary and secondary schools
- links with public libraries and feeder schools are not always well developed
- too many pupils struggle to make effective use of reading for information; some of the teaching they receive in information literacy is unchallenging and repetitive
- the best schools have put in place coherent and well planned programmes for developing information literacy.

Several points for action by schools were suggested, including: extending monitoring and evaluation of the library; improving programmes for teaching information literacy; and providing more opportunities for pupils to develop independent learning and research.

For the afternoon session, delegates worked in either primary or secondary groups. These sessions included consideration of the library training materials produced by the Secondary National Strategy and the opportunities for library development offered by the Primary National Strategy.

Other sessions in the conference included:

- a presentation by Anne Robinson, Librarian of the Year, Nicholas Chamberlaine Technology College, Bedworth
- an introduction to the DfES self evaluation materials by Kathy Lemaire, chief executive of the Schools Library Association
- talks on the role of local schools library service by different speakers from CILIP's schools libraries group
- presentations from some of the good practice schools visited: Stow Heath Junior School, Wolverhampton; Broke Hall Community Primary School, Ipswich; Broxbourne CE Primary School, Hertfordshire; and Batley Girls High School, Kirklees.

There were also opportunities for delegates to work in small groups and to share their own ideas and experiences.

Outcomes

Delegates were asked to identify how they intended to follow up the conference in their schools and local authorities. A wide range of suggestions emerged including: improving links with the schools library service and local authority; feedback to senior managers in school; presentation of findings in local authorities at head of department and headteacher meetings; disseminate through future conferences; joint visits by local authority and schools library service staff to schools; and synopses of the conference in local authority newsletters.

Ofsted plans to follow up the conference through: the provision of a CD to delegates featuring slides from presentations, to be used for dissemination purposes; written articles and reports using evidence from the survey; and systematic evaluation of the impact of the conference in schools and local authorities.

Further information

Further information: for further information about the conference please contact: gary.linin@ofsted.gov.uk

Further information on the seminar, including details of the sessions, outcomes from discussion groups and lesson ideas contributed by delegates, is available from:

www.ofsted.gov.uk

www.cilt.org.uk

www.dfes.gov.uk