

A good education for all: inspection of local authority services – response from CILIP (March 2013)

The Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) welcomes the opportunity to comment on Ofsted's proposals to introduce a new framework for the inspection of local authority services for supporting improvements in schools and other providers. CILIP is established by Royal Charter and is the professional body for library and information professionals in the UK. It has around 15,000 members working in all parts of the UK economy, including in schools and Schools Library Services.

Q3. To what extent to you agree or disagree that the inspection proposals in paragraphs 10 to 11 cover the right areas?

Do you have any general comments or suggestions on this proposal?

CILIP broadly agrees with the inspection proposals set out in the consultation document. However, we wish to make some general comments and suggestions.

HMCI's Annual Report 2011/12 drew attention to the marked inequality of access by children and young people to a good school across the country and to the wide variation between areas. This is also reflected in the marked disparity of school library provision within schools. CILIP believes that throughout their education every child is entitled to¹:

- Support from designated library staff with extensive knowledge, enthusiasm and experience to advise, encourage and inspire wider reading and reading for pleasure to ensure fair provision for all
- A skilled library practitioner with responsibility and time to help children and young people develop the skills needed to manage today's information overload, to become lifelong learners and to meet the future job market's need for problem solvers and independent thinkers

¹ Take from CILIP, 2011. *School Libraries A Right* <http://www.cilip.org.uk/get-involved/advocacy/school-libraries-advocacy/Documents/school-libraries-a-right.pdf>

- A safe and secure library environment for learning during and outside school hours, where help, resources and advice are freely available to all
- High quality and wide-ranging library and classroom resources to support their curriculum which have been carefully selected to meet the needs of their age, learning style and ability and organised to provide easy access and availability
- Be valued as an individual, having access to reading materials which are exploited by a knowledgeable person to support the emotional, cultural, leisure and wider needs of the whole person

Local authorities committed to improvement can influence strategies to ensure that the educational potential of all children and young people is fulfilled in two ways:

- By supporting the Schools Library Service. These are mostly run by local authorities and provide teachers and libraries within schools with advice and training on managing and developing their own libraries and teaching resources, on teaching information and digital fluency to enable children to become independent learners and on helping schools create a reading culture. Their service is especially important for primary schools where professional library expertise may not be available within the school.
- Through the knowledge they have about school libraries and the service and provision actually received by pupils and students

We believe that an inspection framework for local authorities should cover both these elements of school library provision.

Schools Library Service (SLS)

CILIP believes that Schools Library Services play a crucial role in school improvement. CILIP wants to see the coverage of SLSs expanded so that they provide, as far as possible, availability and access to every school in the UK. However, over the last decade there has been a trend of SLSs closing and a survey conducted by CILIP in 2012 found that one in five could be facing the possibility of closure.² SLS are often a traded service to schools who, when faced with tough budget decisions, may be choosing to no longer buy in library support, meaning that many children are missing out on their library entitlement, while the school as a whole is missing the added value and economies of scale to be gained from exploiting

² CILIP, 2012 An Uncertain Future: Schools Library Services in England and Wales 2012
http://www.cilip.org.uk/news-media/Documents/An_Uncertain_Future_Schools_Library_Services_in_England_Wales_2012.pdf

the SLS. This inequality of access to an important service needs to be addressed. We suggest that inspections evaluate what the local authority knows about the level of buy in amongst schools in its area, as well as the support it gives to the local SLS – if there is one. Support could take the form of helping the SLS to market its services to schools and/or diversify its services to provide better value for money. Where a SLS has already closed, the local authority could support schools in brokering services from a SLS in another area.

School Libraries

A well managed school library supports both teaching and learning. CILIP believes that the quality of teaching will be influenced by the support and learning provided by a well resourced library that underpins and enriches the curriculum³. A considerable number of research projects and reports have found a positive correlation between an effective school library and academic achievement⁴.

A key finding from the 2011 School Library Commission's report "School libraries: a plan for improvement"⁵ was that many school libraries are underutilised resources that do not fulfill their potential to improve literacy levels and support pupil learning and attainment. The Ofsted (2006) school library self evaluation framework⁶ emphasized that support and commitment for the library from the head teacher and senior managers is vital. CILIP strongly recommends that inspections of improvement functions include an evaluation of what the local authority knows about school library provision in schools that are not performing as well as they should be and the support and encouragement that is being given to heads and senior managers to ensure that their school library can fulfill its powerful role in raising pupils' literacy levels and improving access to knowledge.

³ See CILIP's response to Ofsted's proposals for amended inspection arrangements for maintained schools and academies and further education and Skills from September 2012 <http://www.cilip.org.uk/get-involved/policy/responses/Documents/Ofsted%20a%20good%20education%20for%20all.pdf>

⁴ For key findings from a selection of the evidence see: <http://www.cilip.org.uk/get-involved/advocacy/school-libraries-advocacy/Documents/Key%20findings%20from%20a%20selection%20of%20the%20evidence.pdf>

⁵ Douglas, J and Wilkinson, S., 2011 *School libraries: a plan for improvement. Report of the School Library Commission*

http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/assets/0000/5718/School_Libraries_A_Plan_for_Improvement.pdf

⁶ Ofsted, 2006. *Good school libraries: making a difference to learning* <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/good-school-libraries-making-difference-learning>