

# The School Library

---

## Good Practice and Areas for Improvement

located at the heart of the school in an attractive building

excellent small exhibitions to encourage arrange author wider reading visits and organise

Schools Library Association recommended minimum of 15 books per pupil for independent schools

events to celebrate policy for cutting stock guarantees that books in the facility are there because of

Worshipful Book Day

pupil librarians have an impressive esprit de corps; they put books away, help to maintain good order, publicise the library around the school, recommend single, computerised catalogue and a system of new purchases, staff the enquiries desk, and even of cross-referencing through the use of key

### RECOMMENDATIONS BASED ON RECENT ISI INSPECTIONS OF HMC SCHOOLS

This document identifies the main features of good practice and of areas needing improvement identified in ISI reports on HMC schools in 2000-1. It does not make any overall judgements of quality. It is produced by HMC for its purposes and is not an ISI evaluation.

January 2002

# Introduction

The ISI reports on HMC schools in 2000-1 commented on a very wide range of library issues, sometimes praising features of a school's library, sometimes drawing attention to short-comings, and sometimes offering suggestions for improvements.

This digest, which has been produced by HMC, seeks to distil all those comments into a check-list of issues which a school might want to consider if it is to make the most of its library. Mirroring the ISI reports, this check-list covers a wide range of issues, but these are not complex or erudite matters. Libraries, it seems, are successful or deficient for numerous very simple reasons: a library may be underused because it is in a remote part of the school and does not have enough chairs; or a library may be well used because teachers set project work which requires library research.

## Good Practice

*"... located at the heart of the school in an attractive building."*

*"Its fairly remote location is one reason why it is not being well used by pupils ..."*

*"... a spacious, light room positioned centrally at the front of the ground floor ..."*

*"... inviting, with comfortable seats, and attractive displays of artwork ..."*

*"... attractive, colourful book displays, and posters and notices ..."*

### Location and Premises

Pupils are more likely to use the library if it located in a prominent area, such as by the main entrance to the school or in the middle of the school buildings.

Similarly, pupils will be attracted into the library if it offers a pleasant and inviting environment. For example, a junior school library might have arrays of cushions to encourage children to settle down for a good read; a senior school library might cultivate a scholarly ambience to promote research and independent study.

The premises need:

- sufficient space to avoid over-crowding and to allow users to access books, materials, computers and equipment without difficulty;
- shelving and storage equipment which are suitable for library use;
- comfortable chairs and desks, and sufficient of them to accommodate a whole class at a time if classes are to have timetabled study periods in the library.

There are various ways to make the library premises attractive, including:

- posters, notices, sporting trophies and artwork, including pupils' artwork;
- displays, perhaps of books on a particular topic, or of new acquisitions, or on the history of the school;
- regularly changing displays;
- dividing the library into silent, quiet and talking zones.

## Stock and Equipment

### *Books, Newspapers and Periodicals*

*“the majority of the books are too old to be relevant to the modern curriculum.”*

Books need to be of good quality, in good condition and up-to-date. The Library Association recommends a minimum of 15.6 books per pupil. The range of books needs to cover fiction and non-fiction. All the subjects studied in the school need to be represented. The number of books and multiple copies in each subject should be in proportion to the number of pupils studying the subject, and take account of the ages at which pupils study the subject. For example, sixth-formers may need a greater range of books on a subject than do Year 7 pupils.

The book stock needs to be regularly culled to ensure that books are there because of their usefulness, but this requires some means of telling which books have been regularly borrowed, as discussed under Stock Control and Security below.

*“A good supply of daily newspapers and periodicals includes ‘Beano’, ‘Alive and Kicking’ and ‘Horse and Pony’.”*

A junior school library

A school library normally also contains a range of newspapers, magazines and periodicals.

### *Computer-Based Resources*

Increasingly, a modern library needs not only books, newspapers, periodicals and other paper-based materials, but also computer-based resources such as CD-ROMs and access to the Internet. The computers would ideally be part of the school computer network so that pupils have access to all the school's software and also to the library catalogue if it is computerised.

### *Equipment*

In order for pupils to make full use of the library's contents and to help them in their study, the library may need to provide computers, possibly both desktop and laptop computers, and a photocopier. Computer scanners and printers might also be needed, as might video and audio-cassette players.

*“...pupils have access to the ...London Library and the British Library Document Supply Centre.”*

### *Other Provision*

A school library may also provide other services such as careers information, an article “clipping” service, historical archives and project packs. A paperback bookshop,

*“Boys are allowed to visit (the monastic library) for A level research ...”*

*“The school belongs to the Island Library Scheme and is sent 300 books each term ...”*

where pupils can buy and sell books, could be operated by the school library, although in some schools a paperback bookshop is provided by the English Department or operated as part of the tuck shop.

It may be possible for pupils to have access to other libraries, such as local public libraries or private libraries connected with the school.

## Departmental Libraries

*“... departments have compiled subject libraries ... books which would be of use to staff and pupils alike and should be listed on the library’s central catalogue ...”*

Departments may maintain their own departmental libraries in addition to the school’s main library. This arrangement can be useful for giving teachers ready access to books during lessons, and it can also be useful as a way of dispersing stock if the main library is short of space.

However, there is a danger that departmental libraries will develop at the expense of the main library, with new stock going into departmental libraries leaving the main library poorly represented in some subject areas. In extreme cases, departmental libraries may lead to the main library becoming little more than a private-study and reading area. To guard against this danger, it is important that departmental libraries are included in the catalogue of the main library so that its users can easily ascertain what is available within the school. In addition, it may be helpful for the school’s library policy, and whatever committees or management structures exist to oversee the library, to address the relationship between the main library and departmental libraries.

*“... the main library is open from 8.30 am to 6.00 pm each weekday...”*

*“... opening hours, 7.45 am to 4.45 pm ...”*

*“... from 8.30 am until 1.15 pm on Saturday ... plans ... to extend its opening hours on nights on two nights each week ...”*

## Opening Hours

The library needs to be open at times when pupils are able to use it. Sixth-formers may have private study periods throughout the school day, but other pupils will not usually be able to use the library during lesson times. It is therefore important that the library is open during lunch and break times, and before and after school, as well as at times when sixth-formers can use it.

A boarding school library would ideally also be open in the evenings and during part of the weekend, perhaps on Saturday mornings.

## Stock Control and Security

The library stock needs to be catalogued, both so that users know what is available and so that it is possible to keep track of the stock. When books are issued and returned, some efficient means of record-keeping is needed. Ideally, the catalogue and the

*“...a computerised book loan system not always used ... significant numbers of loans have to be transcribed from a ledger in which pupils have entered details.”*

*“Data on borrowing patterns and other reader information can be accessed by form teachers.”*

*“... bar-coding for all library books as a big aid to easy stock-taking ...”*

*“... pupils issue their own books using the software installed, which provides them with a good example of the application of ICT.”*

*“A small paperback bookshop is housed in one bay, but the books are kept behind grilles which reduce any incentive to peruse or purchase.”*

*“An outstanding feature of the library is the involvement of pupils. There are 13 senior librarians, drawn from the top four years, and there are also junior librarians drawn from the younger pupils. The pupil librarians have an impressive ‘esprit de corps’; they put books away, help to*

issuing system should be computerised. A computerised system should have the following features.

- It should be simple enough to enable pupils to use the catalogue, and to use the issuing system if there are to be pupil-librarians. This is particularly an issue for junior schools.
- It should allow more than one person at a time on-line access to the catalogue, which implies networked computers are needed. If the catalogue is linked to the school’s computer network, users throughout the school will be able to see what resources are available in the library.
- It should provide cross-referenced searches using key words.
- It should be capable of generating management information, such as detailed borrowing records for an individual or a group of pupils (for example for forms or subjects groups), the numbers of books issued at any one time and over specified periods, how often individual books have been issued (in order to identify stock which needs to be culled) and annual section listings to help departments to decide what new purchases to recommend.

Some form of security system is needed, the simplest being to have the library staffed whenever it is open. Almost invariably, school libraries which are not always staffed and which sometimes rely on users to issue their own books suffer heavy losses of stock. Library staff can of course include pupil librarians. In the absence of librarian staffing, the presence of teachers in the library, perhaps as users, can provide some degree of security. One school found that fitting the library with security cameras “considerably reduced” the rate of book loss. On the other hand, if security measures are too restrictive – locking books away, for example - they may discourage or prevent pupils from using the library.

## Staffing

What staff a library needs depends very much on the nature of the library and the school. A small junior school library might be managed quite satisfactorily on a part-time basis by one of the teachers. A large senior school library might need full-time professionally qualified librarians. A library may have core staff, who have library expertise and are responsible for managing the library, and supplementary staff who carry out routine work.

The staffing possibilities are varied and include the following:

- full-time or part-time professionally qualified librarians;

*maintain good order, publicise the library around the school, recommend new purchases, staff the enquiries desk, and even repair damaged stock. They are enthusiastic, efficient and courteous.”*

*“A sixth-former has just put the library catalogue (some 17,890 books) on to a database.”*

- teaching staff with some qualifications, experience or interest in librarianship, particularly if they are willing to attend study courses or conferences to improve their expertise;
- temporary professional or clerical staff, particularly for tasks such as computerising the catalogue and bar-coding all the stock;
- pupil-librarians: many schools have found that involving pupils in the running of the library works extremely well – pupils enjoy the work and the school has the benefit of competent help in operating its library;
- voluntary help, for example from parents or gap-year students;
- combinations of the above: for example, in one school, the school Librarian is a member of the teaching staff, and the Assistant Librarian is a professionally qualified librarian employed on a part-time basis.

## **Liaison with Academic Staff and Departments**

The library needs good contact with the teaching staff and the subject departments to ensure it contains the right stock and that pupils use the library. It may not be sufficient for the library simply to invite departments to suggest new acquisitions or to collaborate with the library in devising project work for pupils. Formal mechanisms may be needed, such as a library committee comprising representatives from the library and the departments, or arranging for librarians to attend faculty meetings.

## **Encouraging Pupils to Use the Library**

Students need to be encouraged to use the library. Even a magnificent library, wonderfully equipped and in an ideal location, may be neglected if the pupils are not encouraged to use it. There are various ways of doing this.

- Pupils can be formally introduced to the library and what it can offer by means of induction sessions provided by library staff or perhaps by the English Department. Year 7 and Year 9 pupils often receive such sessions, and pupils beginning the sixth form may be given more advanced training in research skills.
- The library is a tool. Pupils will use it if the work they are given in their subjects requires library research. Teachers can collaborate with the librarians to set pupils suitable project work. The library may be able to develop a bank of ready-made projects, with instructions, suggestions and materials, which teachers would be able to use in setting work for pupils. Departments can also

*“The Librarian on her own cannot stimulate an interest in reading or research ...”*

*“Where collaboration exists, such as in project work in history and biology, the use of the (library) is optimised.”*

*“... arrange author visits and celebrate World Book Day.”*

*“A writers club, the Young Enterprise group and the pupil-run stationery shop are encouraged to make (the library) their base to attract others into the premises.”*

*“The Third Form literary lunch ... was a delightful and stimulating occasion ...”*

*“Library News alerts pupils to particular events ...”*

*“A selection of fiction is arranged by level of difficulty for the EFL pupils ...”*

produce reading lists to encourage pupils to use the library to explore their subjects.

- Pupils can have supervised timetabled sessions in the library, for reading, project work or private study. However, there are also risks in imposing compulsory attendance at the library: some pupils may be disruptive or develop a dislike of the library, and other users may be displaced by the arrival of a whole class in the library.
- The library can provide activities, displays and exhibitions to attract pupils. Examples include book clubs, book fairs, book review competitions, a structured Reading Award Scheme to encourage reading, a Users’ Group to recommend new acquisitions, a Young Readers’ Corner, “Author of the Week” displays, hosting talks and events for school societies including an after-school homework club, and an in-house library publication to advertise activities in the library.
- Some pupils, such as EFL pupils or dyslexic pupils, will be more likely to use the library if it takes account of their particular needs, and provides appropriate books and materials which they can find easily. For example, books could be colour-coded to help slower readers and foreign pupils find ones which are easier to read, and audio tape versions of books could be provided.

*“... funds generated from the Book Plate Appeal.”*

*“... the (specialist) Library bought with donations from (old boys).”*

## **Funding-Raising**

The library may be able to supplement its budget through appeals to parents or to old boys and girls, and by events such as an annual book fair. Levying fines for the late return of books also generates some money.

## **A School Policy for the Library**

In order for the library to operate at its best, it is helpful if the school has a clear view of the library’s role, its relationship to departmental and house libraries and other ICT facilities in the school, what its budget, staffing and objectives should be, how it might need to develop, and what assistance it might need. A policy document can be a means of focusing attention on these issues. Similarly, it will be helpful if the library is represented in the formal committee structures of the school and in its decision-making processes.

## **Advice and Help**

The Library Association provides published advice on the range, availability, quality and accessibility of library stock and on support utilities. It can also recommend consultants to provide more detailed advice. In addition, a school considering substantial changes to its library may want to visit other schools to learn from their experiences.

## **Areas Needing Improvement**

Almost every school had some areas in which its library could be improved, but these varied enormously from school to school. The most common problems, starting with the most widespread ones, were:

- students not using the library sufficiently; either because there was some deficiency in the library or because they were not sufficiently encouraged to use it;
- departments not liaising with the library;
- inadequate cataloguing and security;
- inadequate stock and equipment.

All these areas are addressed in the check-list of good practice above.